NATION

After Satya Pal Malik raps govt, CBI raids him

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India will be $10T economy, set for 3rd largest slot: WEF Prez

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Holders CSK to play RCB in IPL opener in Chennai on 22 March

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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6 killed in Belagavi car crash

BELAGAVI/ BENGALURU, 22 FEB

Six people were killed when the car they were travelling in crashed into a tree in Khanapur taluk of Belagavi district on Thursday. Around 10 people were travelling in the car. According to police, the victims were returning from a wedding function. The deceased are, the car driver Shahrukh Pendari, 30 ,Iqbal Jamadar,50, Sania Langoti, 37, Umara Begum Langoti,17,Shabunam Langoti,37,and Faran Langoti,13.The other passengers Farat Betageri,18, Sufia Langoti,22, Sania Jamadar,36 and Mahin Langoti,7, were severely injured and was shifted to a nearby hospital. Belagavi Superintendent of Police, Dr Bhima Shankar Guled visited the spot for investigation. *—Salar News*

Monkey fever claims first life in Uttara Kannada

BENGALURU, 22 FEB

A 65-year-old woman from Jiddi village succumbed to Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), also known as monkey fever, on Thursday, marking the first such death in Uttar Kannada district. This has raised concerns among health authorities, particularly due to the lack of a widely available and effective vaccine.The woman's condition reportedly deteriorated rapidly on Wednesday, leading to her critical state. This incident comes amid an ongoing outbreak of monkey fever in the State, with 103 active cases and two previous fatalities in Chikkamagaluru and Shivamogga districts. State Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao has held discussions with Indian Council of Medical Research to expedite access to vaccine. *—Salar News*

Govt allows 54K tonnes onion exports to 4 nations

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Amid export ban on onion, India on Thursday took an exception and permitted overseas sale of a fixed quantity of 54,760 tonnes of the key kitchen staple to Bangladesh, Mauritius, Bahrain and Bhutan. "We have allowed export of 50,000 tonnes of onion to Bangladesh, 1,200 tonnes to Mauritius, 3,000 tonnes of Bahrain and 560 tonnes to Bhutan with immediate effect," Consumer Affairs Secretary Rohit Kumar Singh told PTI. Singh said the decision has been taken following a recommendation from the external affairs ministry. *—Salar News*

Maryam Nawaz set to be 1st woman CM of Pak's Punjab

LAHORE, 22 FEB

Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif, is set to become the first woman Chief Minister of Pakistan's Punjab province following the summoning of the inaugural session of the provincial legislature on Friday. Out of five Assemblies in Pakistan that went to the polls on 8 February, the Punjab Assembly is the first house convening its opening session. "Punjab Governor Balighur Rahman has called the Punjab Assembly session for Friday, in which newly elected members of the assembly will swear in and formation of the new government will begin," a spokesperson for the Governor's House said on Thursday. *—PTI*

X slams govt over order to block farmer protest handles

Govt asks social media firms to block 177 accounts linked to protest

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Social media platform X on Thursday expressed disagreement with the Indian government's order to block accounts and posts related to the ongoing farmers' protests and called for extending freedom of expression to the affected posts.

The Ministry of Electronics and IT has ordered social media platforms to temporarily block 177 accounts that were linked to farmers' protests.

"The Indian government has issued executive orders requiring X to act on specific accounts and posts, subject to potential penalties including significant fines and imprisonment. In compliance with the orders, we will withhold these accounts and posts in India alone; however, we disagree with these actions and maintain that freedom of expression should extend to these posts," X said in a post.

It said that a writ appeal challenging the Indian government's blocking orders remains pending and called for making the order public to enhance transparency. "Due to legal restrictions, we are unable to publish the executive orders, but we believe that making them public is essential for transparency. This lack of disclosure can lead to a lack of accountability and arbitrary decision-making," X said. It has provided the impacted users with notice of the government actions in accordance with the company's policies. *—PTI*

X has provided the impacted users with notice of the government actions in accordance with the company's policies **PHOTO: PTI**

Karnataka passes resolutions asking Centre for MSP

Karnataka Assembly on Thursday passed resolutions urging the Centre to fix minimum support price for all crops. The State also urged Centre to ensure equal distribution and non-discriminatory allocation of financial resources, condemning it for injustice in disbursing state's share of taxes and special grants. *—PTI*

SKM DEMANDS MURDER FIR AGAINST H'YANA CM

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) on Thursday demanded the registration of a murder case over the death of a protesting farmer on the Punjab-Haryana border and announced a Black Day and a tractor march to condemn the incident.

Subhkaran Singh, 21, died Wednesday amid clashes between Haryana Police and Punjab farmers, whose Delhi Chalo march has been stalled at Khanauri border point in Punjab's Sangrur's district. The Punjab farmers are demanding a legal guarantee from Centre on minimum support price for their crops.

SKM, which had led the 2020-21 farmers' agitation against three central laws, is not part of the Delhi Chalo agitation, however, it has been supporting it. SKM after a meeting here said farmers will take out tractor marches on highways across country on 26 February. *—PTI*

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AMID BJP BOYCOTT

FAR Bill passed in Legislative Council

The Bill allows developers to build additional floors **PHOTO: PTI**

BENGALURU, 22 FEB

The Bill that provides for selling and purchasing premium floor area ratio (FAR) was passed in Legislative Council on Thursday after a marathon debate and boycott by BJP members.

The Bill, 'Karnataka Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Bill 2024', was tabled in the Legislative Council by Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar. The Bill allows developers to build additional floors by purchasing additional FAR and paying a fee of 40% of the guidance value to local planning authorities. The Bill also allows selling FAR.

The premium FAR has been limited to 0.4 per cent and the limit for the Transferrable Development Right is at 0.6 per cent. Premium FAR provision is expected to increase revenue to local planning authorities, which therefore can invest more in developmental works. The Bill provides for the proceeds from premium FAR fees to be used for land acquisition and development of basic amenities. The FAR is currently determined based on road width, zones and other parameters. Congress MLA Nagaraj Yadav said, "Providing full powers to the local planning authorities to issue premium FAR will speed up decentralised decision-making." Pointing out that additional construction due to additional FAR may result in congestion on smaller roads, BJP MLA K S Naveen sought government intervention on the matter. "This will increase strain on Bengaluru's infrastructure and hence the government should pass the Bill only after detailed deliberation by a review committee," BJP MLA Keshavaprasad said. *—Salar News*

Manipur HC revokes order on Meitei as ST

IMPHAL, 22 FEB

The Manipur High Court has ordered deletion of a paragraph from a March 2023 order that urged the state to consider including the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribe list, saying the paragraph was in conflict with the Supreme Court's constitution bench stance.

The 27 March, 2023 directive, believed to be a catalyst for ethnic unrest that claimed over 200 lives, was rescinded by a single judge bench of Justice Golmei Gaiphulshillu during a review petition hearing on Wednesday.

The contentious paragraph from last year's verdict, instructing the state to expedite consideration of Meitei community inclusion, was deemed for deletion.

The paragraph of the last year verdict stated the state government "shall consider the case of the petitioners for inclusion of Meetei/ Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes list, expeditiously, preferably within a period of four weeks" from the date of receipt of the order.

Justice Gaiphulshillu's ruling on 21 February emphasised the necessity of removing the directive, pointing to the Government of India's stipulated procedure for Scheduled Tribe list amendments.

Referring to the constitutional protocol detailed in the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' 2013-14 report, the court highlighted the need for alignment with the Supreme Court's constitutional interpretation.

The High Court's detailed 19-page verdict underlined the legislative limitations on judicial interference concerning Scheduled Tribe classifications, as outlined by a constitution bench ruling in November 2000.

The constitution bench had elucidated that courts should not overstep their jurisdiction in determining such categorisations. Following the eruption of violence post the 27 March order, a series of petitions, including challenges to the High Court directive, were presented to the Supreme Court. *—PTI*

MAHAMASTAKABHISHEKA COMMENCES

Venur, Dakshina Kannada, is hosting Mahamastakabhisheka of the Bahubali Swamy statue from 22 February to 1 March

- The Jain festival anoints the statue once in 12 years
- The statue is bathed in milk, saffron, ghee, sugarcane juice and sandalwood paste
- 30,000 devotees to attend
- It pays tribute to Bahubali, a prince who forfeited his kingdom and meditated motionlessly for 12 years
- This is 5th Mahamastakabhisheka since installation in 1604, 1st was held in 1928

ABOUT THE STATUE

35ft tall Height	Monolithic statue	3rd oldest in the State

Devotees throng to Venur for ceremony

The ritual involves 108 Kalasha Maha mastakabishekas on the first four days. From 26 to 28 February, 216 Kalasha Mahama stakabhishekas will be held and on 29 February, 504 Kalasha Mahamasta kabhishekas will be carried out. A total of 1,008 Kalash abhishekas will be held on the final day. A five-storied platform has been erected for the ceremony, with Yatis and dignitaries ascending the structure to perform the ritual. The statue is situated on the north banks of the Phalguni river in Venur. Thimmannarasa, the current king of the Ajila princely family from Aladangady that erected the statue, is overseeing the preparations. *—Salar News*

Panel clears ₹19K cr deal for 200 BrahMos missiles

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has accorded approval for procurement of more than 200 BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles and associated equipment for the Indian Navy at a cost of around Rs 19,000 crore, people familiar with the matter said on Thursday.

The missiles will largely be deployed on various warships to enhance overall combat capabilities of the Navy, they said.

It is learnt that the proposal approved by the CCS entails acquisition of a mix of BrahMos missiles having a range of around 290km and the latest extended range variant of the weapon with a range of around 450 km.

BrahMos Aerospace Pvt Ltd, an India-Russian joint venture, produces the supersonic cruise missiles that can be launched from submarines, ships, aircraft, or land platforms. BrahMos missile flies at a speed of 2.8 Mach or almost three times the speed of sound. *—PTI*

CONG-AAP TALKS ON SEAT SHARING IN DELHI, GUJ, HARYANA IN FINAL STAGE

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Congress and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are likely to have a seat-sharing pact in Delhi, Gujarat and Haryana, and the decision is likely to be made public very soon, top sources said here on Thursday. Both sides have agreed on the seats to be contested by each party, they said. AAP will field candidates from the South Delhi, West Delhi, North West Delhi and New Delhi seats, while the Congress will contest from the Chandni Chowk, East Delhi and North East Delhi constituencies, according tosources in AAP . *—PTI*

CBSE plans open-book exams for Classes 9-12

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is planning a pilot run of Open-Book Exams (OBE) in selected schools for classes 9 to 12 later this year, according to officials.

The idea was floated in the last governing body meeting of the Board in December, 2023. Officials, however, said there is no plan to adopt the format in class 10 and 12 board exams. "CBSE targeting subjects English, Mathematics, and Science for Classes 9 and 10, and English, Mathematics, and Biology for Classes 11 and 12. The aim is to gauge the time taken by students to complete these tests and gather feedback from stakeholders. "The plan is in line with recommendations made in the National Curriculum Framework. These tests would undergo a pilot phase in schools to evaluate various aspects such as completion time, suitability for formative and summative assessment, and stakeholders' perceptions," a senior board official said.In an open-book exam, students are allowed to carry their notes, textbooks, or other study material and refer to them during the exam. The pilot will be focused on assessing higher-order thinking skills, and application. *—PTI*

AVOID ROW, SAYS HC

HC asks WB to rename lions 'Sita', 'Akbar'

KOLKATA, 22 FEB

The Jalpaiguri Circuit Bench of the Calcutta High Court on Thursday verbally observed that the naming of a lioness and lion as "Sita" and "Akbar" should have been shunned to avoid controversy.

The bench also suggested that the West Bengal Zoo Authority take a prudent decision by renaming them. Hearing petitions by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's north Bengal unit and two other individuals, Justice Saugata Bhattacharyya asked whether an animal can be named after gods, mythological heroes, freedom fighters or Nobel laureates.

Justice Saugata Bhattacharyya asked whether an animal can be named after gods **PHOTO: ANI**

Maintaining that this would not be reflected in the order, the Judge suggested to the state's lawyer that he use his good office and ask the zoo authorities to give different names to the lion and the lioness to avoid controversy.

The court said that India is a secular country and every community has the right to pursue or follow their own religion. The Judge asked, "Why should you draw controversy by naming a lioness and a lion after Sita and Akbar?"

He said that Sita is worshipped by a large section of citizens, while Akbar "was a very successful and secular Mughal emperor." He asked whether a lion could be named after Swami Vivekananda or Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Justice Bhattacharya said he has no support in the naming of both animals. *—PTI*

BYJU'S BOARD TO VOTE ON CEO'S OUSTER TODAY

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Shareholders at Byju's are set to vote on Friday on a resolution brought by some investors to oust founder CEO Byju Raveendran and his family members over alleged "mismanagement and failures" at what was once India's hottest tech startup. However, the outcome of the vote at the extraordinary general meeting (EGM) will not be applicable until 13 March, when the Karnataka High Court will next hear Raveendran's plea challenging the move by certain investors. *—PTI*

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PHOTO: SALAR

Bandipur tourist who encountered jumbo fined Rs 25K

CHAMARAJANAGAR, 22 FEB

A tourist was slapped with a fine of Rs 25,000 by the Bandipur Forest Department. The incident occurred on 11 February near Moolehole in Bandipur, where visitors from Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, narrowly escaped peril when they came face to face with the enraged elephant. According to reports, a group of two tourists ventured out of their vehicle onto a forest road, where they unexpectedly encountered an elephant. One individual was less fortunate and bore the brunt of the elephant's aggression. Bandipur Forest Department has initiated a thorough investigation into the incident. Subsequently, they levied a fine of Rs 25,000 on Murti, one of the tourists involved, based on media reports and inquiries led by the Bandipur Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF). In a bid to forestall mishaps, forest department has imposed a ban on parking vehicles within the forest area, to mitigate the risk of wildlife encounters. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

CM launches Ragi Malt distribution programme

BENGALURU, 22 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday inaugurated the Sai Sure Ragi Malt Health Mix distribution programme at Vidhana Soudha banquet hall. The government has announced the distribution of ragi malt to 55 lakh government school children for better physical and mental health. It will be distributed to all government and aided school children in the State from the academic year 2023-24. Speaking at the inauguration Siddaramaiah said that good nutrition leads to good education. "The programme of providing the nutritious ragi malt has started as children should not suffer from anaemia or other malnutrition issues. Only when there is no nutritional deficiency children will excel in studies. Children irrespective of their economic conditions, like children of the poor, labourers, Dalits and shudras should also get good education, as they are the ones who will shape the future of the country," he said. *—Salar News*

Rehabilitation Facility Centre for specially-abled

DAVANGERE, 22 FEB

A Joint Regional Centre for Skill Development, Rehabilitation, and Empowerment of specially-abled people, backed by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment was inaugurated in Davangere on Wednesday. Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Dr Veerendra Kumar, virtually inaugurated the ceremony. Situated in Vaddanahalli village near Davangere, the Centre stands as a beacon of hope for specially-abled individuals in Karnataka and Goa, representing an investment of Rs 25 crores. MP GM Siddeshwar earlier had laid the foundation stone for the project. The inauguration witnessed the presence of former MLA Linganna from Mayakonda, who joined in the celebration of this momentous occasion. Speaking at the event, Siddeshwar emphasized the critical role of the centre in providing comprehensive training and rehabilitation services to individuals facing speech and mobility challenges. The centre, built for Rs 25 crores, is poised to become a hub of skill development and empowerment, with plans underway to establish a 100-bed hospital and facilitate employment opportunities for talented individuals. *—Salar News*

SILICON VALLEY BATTLES WATER CRISIS

Erratic rainfall, depleting groundwater levels and growing demand have pushed the City to its limits

MEGHANA PRASAD
BENGALURU, 22 FEB

Bengaluru, once known for its abundant water resources, is facing a severe water crisis this summer. Erratic rainfall, depleting groundwater levels and growing demand have pushed the City to its limits. The brunt of the crisis falls heavily on households.

The groundwater in Bengaluru is drying up. "Among the 11,000 borewells in the City, 1,240 are already dried up and it's not long before the remaining starts to dry up as well," Suresh B, Chief Engineer of Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board of (BWSSB), told **Salar News.** The areas that are facing severe water crisis in the City are Bellandur, Jakkur, Ramamurthy Nagar, Singasandra and Devanahalli, according to BWSSB.

The City needs to find additional sources of water. "On average, we supply 1,450 million litres of water daily to Bengaluru from waterbodies in the State. Additionally, there are around 11,000 borewells in Bengaluru that supply 400 million litres of water daily to the City. Even though 1,850 million litres of water (from waterbodies and borewells) is supplied daily, it is not enough for the City," Suresh said.

Around 110 villages along the outskirts of Bengaluru are deprived of water due to the extreme consumption of water in the City. "We require an extra 1,680 million litres to supply water daily to these 110 villages," he said.

Borewells are drying up in Bengaluru and residents are paying a lot for water tankers as City fights major crisis *PHOTO: PIXABAY/PTI*

Water tankers find it tough to meet demands

Many areas in the City are dependent on the water tankers during the time of crisis. Mallappa, a water tank supplier (Kalkere and its surrounding areas), told **Salar News**: "We are getting a lot of demands from apartments for water and we charge Rs 1,000 for 7,000 litres of water. We have to charge that much as the water levels have come down in many places and there is no place where we can find more water. We solely depend on groundwater, and if that itself is depleting then our work will be cut off."

Some water tanker operators are planning to cut down their operations due to the crisis. "We charge Rs 600 for 5,000 litres of water. We supply mostly to restaurants and if there is an emergency we give to apartments as well. Now that summer is coming, the water supply may drop from our side as well due to water shortage," said Syed Faruq, a water tank supplier to Sarjapur and nearby areas.

Apartments resort to drastic measures

Apartments in the City are resorting to several steps to mitigate this crisis. Short showers, reuse of greywater (water from wash basins, showers, bathtubs and kitchen) and meticulous leak detection have become the norm. "We release water at alternate hours to residents so that equal amounts of water in a controlled measurement is being supplied to every house," said Jayadeva, a member of the owners' association at Raheja Gardenia in Shivaji Nagar.

Malathi S, a member of Brigade Woods Residents and Owners Association (Brigade Woods) near ITPL main road in KR Puram, said: "We have been supplying water at a low pressure so that maximum water gets saved. Along with that, we have a period in which the water will be supplied to all the residents. And they will have access only at that time to save water for the whole day. In this way, we can have control over how much water we are using."

Many apartments in the City have started harvesting rainwater and installed individual water meters. "We used to have master water meters in our apartments before. Once we found out that the water consumption is increasing every month, we decided to install individual water meters in each resident's house so that they are responsible for their water consumption," said Venkatraman S, the association head of Brigade Meadows, Saalu Hunase village, Kanakapura Road.

Many high-rise apartments in Bengaluru have started awareness campaigns, urging residents to adopt water-saving practices.

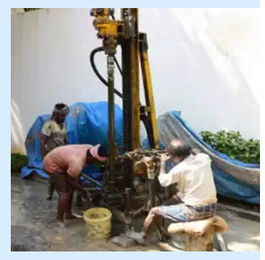
—Salar News

Many water ATMs shut

Many of the water ATMs in Yeshwanthpur, Rajarajeshwari Nagar and Kengeri have shut down due to the lack of water supply. The government-operated Reverse Osmosis (RO) units or water ATMs in many areas of the City have increased the rates from Rs 5 to Rs 10 for a 20-litre supply. Some ATMs run by private companies, who were charging Rs 8 for 20 litres, have now increased it to Rs 15.

BWSSB plans more borewells

BWSSB will be taking measures to reduce the water scarcity in the City, Chief Engineer Suresh said. "KRS and Kabini dams are now having 22,000 TMC (thousand million cubic feet) of water, which is enough to support the City for another 2-3 months. We are planning to dig more borewells where there is more groundwater," he said. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said supplying drinking water to Bengaluru is a big problem. "Bengaluru is rapidly growing every year and the City's population is rising by 10 lakh a year. For the sake of City's respect and pride, we want to prioritise drinking water first," he said. Shivakumar said the State is not getting enough water from Cauvery and tankers draw water from borewells. "Almost 20 per cent of Bengaluru's water needs are met through tankers," he said. Acknowledging the need for a comprehensive solution, Shivakumar said, "We need a major solution. That's why we're fighting for the Mekedatu project."



SKILLS AT DISPLAY

State Forest Minister Eshwara Khandre interacts with tribals with their crafts made from the invasive plant species Lantana Camara at Lalbagh in Bengaluru on Thursday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Cong, BJP spar over temple funds bill

BENGALURU, 22 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday slammed BJP, saying it has hurled allegations against the government over amendments to the Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowment Bill, in order to mislead people and polarise them along communal lines.

Karnataka Assembly on Wednesday passed the Hindu Religious Endowments (Amendment) Act, which according to government sources, will enable the government to collect a percentage of the earnings of temples for providing facilities and safety to pilgrims within the jurisdiction of Group 'A' temples.It is proposed to collect five per cent from temples earning Rs 10 lakh but less than Rs one crore, and 10 per cent from those earning above Rs one crore.

BJP State unit Chief BY Vijayendra portrayed this levy as the government's plan to "gobble up" revenue. He alleged that this not only reflects the deplorable condition of this government's finances, but also went to make the claim that is shows its "abject hate" towards Hindu Dharma.Siddaramaiah hit back, saying Vijayendra is a good fit for the post of BJP state chief as he is inclined to lying, and pointed out that funds collected from temples are used for the sole purpose of Hindu institutions and Hindu community welfare alone, and not for any other religious communities or purposes, contrary to the opposition party's claims.

He said the levy has been misrepresented for political gain. There has always been a mandate to create a common pool since the enactment of the Act in 1997, he underlined.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar claimed Congress will discontinue the five guarantees after Lok Sabha elections. *PHOTO: SALAR*

The common pool is administered solely for religious purposes connected with the Hindu religion, Siddaramaiah pointed out. He added that the Common Pool Fund has been utilised only for the religious purposes of Hindu institutions since the Act came into force in 2003, and it will continue to be used for the same purposes. "It has not been utilised for any other purposes or for the benefit of followers of other religions. These provisions underscore a commitment to using temple funds for the welfare and upliftment of the Hindu community, directly contradicting claims of misallocation of funds for non-Hindu purposes or the imposition of unfair taxes," the chief minister underscored. "The baseless allegations by BJP leaders are aimed only at misleading the public and polarising people along communal lines for political leverage. BJP leaders should be ashamed of their unethical practices," Siddaramaiah added.

—Salar News with Agencie

CONG WILL STOP GUARANTEES AFTER POLL: BJP

BENGALURU, 22 FEB

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Arvind Bellad on Thursday claimed Congress will discontinue the five guarantees after Lok Sabha elections.

Bellad claimed Congress would exclude Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, government outsourcing and contract workers, guest teachers, and gram panchayat assistants from the benefits.He alleged the Finance Department had already flagged the financial difficulties being faced by the State by implementing the guarantees.

He also claims govt will exclude income taxpayers, women filing GST returns, landholders of more than five acres of dry land, persons with an income of Rs 1.2 lakh per year, four-wheel owners, government employees, and pensioners.He said the government had targeted to collect Rs 38,525 crore from selling liquor in 2024-25 and nearly 85 per cent of the poor people consume liquor by paying hefty taxes which would be used to implement the five guarantees. BJP State President BY Vijayendra alleged that government has no money to pay salaries to its employees. Also, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka said the State has to pay Rs 30,000 crore in interest for the loans it has taken and this has plunged the State into debt. *—Salar News*

STATE SEEKS MEA'S HELP TO SAVE MEN FORCED TO FIGHT IN RUSSIA

BENGALURU, 22 FEB

Karnataka government has written to the External Affairs Ministry for the rescue of three young men from the State, amid reports that they were being forced to fight in Russia's war with Ukraine, Minister Priyank Kharge said on Thursday.

He urged the Central government to take this matter seriously and come to their rescue immediately. In what is said to be a "job fraud", according to reports, three from Kalaburagi district and one from neighbouring Telangana are stranded on the Russia-Ukraine border, after they were allegedly sent to Russia by their recruiters with a promise that they will be working as army security helpers, but were being forced to fight in Russia's ongoing war with Ukraine against their will.They have been recruited into the Wagner Group for war with Ukraine.Speaking to reporters here, he said that he has also spoken to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge last night and requested him to bring it to the notice of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, and he has assured that he will speak to the Minister and will also write a letter to him.

PHOTO: PTI

> **My son left for Russia on 18 December, 2023, for a security helper's job but now he is asked to fight the war**
>
> -Nawaz Kalagi, father of Syed Iliyas Hussain

Nawaz Kalagi, father of the youth Syed Iliyas Hussain stuck in Russia, urged with the Centre and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to help bring his son back.

"My son left for Russia on 18 December, 2023, for a security helper's job but now he is asked to fight the war. My son used to work in Dubai and from there he left to Russia," said Father. The incident came to light after the youths shared a video of their problems.

—Salar News with Agencies

Ex-MP returns to Cong ahead of LS polls

BENGALURU, 22 FEB

Former Member of Parliament from Tumakuru SP Muddahanumegowda on Thursday returned to the Congress, ahead of the Lok Sabha polls later this year.

He had quit Congress and had jumped ship to the BJP in 2022, ahead of the Assembly polls in 2023. The senior leader was admitted into the Congress in the presence of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, party's state unit President and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Ministers G Parameshwara and K N Rajanna, and several party leaders and workers. He is expected to be the party's candidate from Tumakuru for the Lok Sabha polls, according to Congress sources. Muddahanumegowda said though defection is a well-accepted phenomenon today for both political parties and people, he had defected to the BJP with a lot of pain, only to contest the election. His actions had hurt party workers and leaders, and he would apologise to them, he added.Stating that he had been district Congress president and MLA from the party for 10 years and MP for five years, he said he has come back to the party that gave him a political identity, realising his mistake. *—Salar News*

CITING HEALTH ISSUES

Mysuru civic workers demand quality food

MYSURU, 22 FEB

Mysore City Corporation's (MCC) civic workers have raised concerns over the quality of breakfast provided to them before they commence their sanitation duties. The workers have expressed dissatisfaction with the current breakfast offerings, emphasizing the need for immediate improvements to ensure their well-being.

The issue came to light when a cockroach was discovered in a pan meant for serving breakfast at a designated point in Vijayanagar, where civic workers gather before starting their daily cleaning activities. The discovery has sparked outrage among the workers, prompting them to demand swift action against the contractors responsible for providing substandard food.

The issue came to light when a cockroach was discovered in a pan meant for serving breakfast in Vijayanagar *PHOTO: SALAR*

Similar to the model adopted by the Bengaluru Bruhat Mahanagara Corporation, Mysore City Corporation has been providing breakfast to its civic workers, with a tender process in place for catering services amounting to an annual expenditure of Rs 2.5 crore. Breakfast points have been established across the city, including parks, Indira Canteens, and community Centres, where workers can fuel up before beginning their tasks.

However, workers have highlighted several issues plaguing the breakfast distribution process, including inadequate water supply, scarcity of plates, and unhygienic conditions at some breakfast points. They lamented that food is often left unattended until their arrival, leading to concerns about contamination from animals such as cats, mice, and rats.

The President of the workers' union Manchaiah expressed concerns about the negligence stressing the importance of clean and nutritious food for maintaining workers' health and well-being. The workers are urging authorities to address these issues promptly to ensure that they receive quality breakfast that meets their dietary requirements and standards of hygiene.

—Salar News

Protesting farmer's death a murder: SKM

Samyukta Kisan Morcha is going to observe 'Black Day' on Monday & take out tractor rally

CHANDIGARH, 22 FEB

Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM)on Thursday demanded the registration of a murder case over the death of a protesting farmer on the Punjab-Haryana border and announced a Black Day and a tractor march to condemn the incident.

Subhkaran Singh, 21, had died Wednesday amid clashes between Haryana Police and Punjab farmers, whose Delhi Chalo march has been stalled at Khanauri border point in Punjab's Sangrur's district. The Punjab farmers are demanding a legal guarantee from Centre on minimum support price for their crops.

SKM, which had led the 2020-21 farmers' agitation against three central laws, is not part of the Delhi Chaloagitation, however, it has been supporting it. SKM after a meeting here said farmers will take out tractor marches on highways across country on 26 February and hold a Mahapanchayat in Delhi on 14 March.

It said the farmers on Friday will burn effigies of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and his Haryana counterpart Anil Vij to condemn the police action.A case of murder should be registered over the death of the farmer at Khanauri border and his family be given Rs 1 crore in compensation, SKM leader Balbir Singh Rajewal told reporters here.

Samyukta Kisan Morcha on Thursday demanded the registration of a murder case over the death of a protesting farmer **PHOTO: PTI**

Subhkaran Singh, a native of Bathinda district, was brought dead at a hospital from Khanauri on the Sangrur-Jind border. He had died allegedly in a clash with police, 12 of whom were also injured, at the Khanauri border point on the Punjab-Haryana border.

The incident took place when the farmers rushed to the barricades, several layers of which have been erected by Haryana authorities to prevent farmers from proceeding with their march, clashing with security forces. SKM Thursday held a meeting here to discuss the situation at Shambhu and Khanauri border points where thousands of farmers are camping as part of the 'Delhi Chalo' call.

- Subhkaran Singh, 21, had died Wednesday amid clashes between Haryana Police and Punjab farmers, whose Delhi Chalo march has been stalled at Khanauri border point in Punjab's Sangrur's district.

Farmers leaders had on Wednesday put the march on hold for two days after a farmer's death, who was later identified as Subhkaran Singh, saying they would decide their next course of action Friday evening.

Besides MSP, Punjab farmers are also demanding the implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, pension for farmers and farm labourers, no hike in electricity tariff, withdrawal of police cases, and "justice" for the victims of the 2021 LakhimpurKheri violence. —*PTI*

SUGARCANE FRP HIKE DRAWS MIXED RESPONSE

BAGHPAT/MEERUT, 22 FEB

The farm community in western Uttar Pradesh has given a mixed response to the government's decision to increase Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane to Rs 340 per quintal.

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday decided to hike the minimum price that mills have to pay to sugarcane growers by Rs 25 to Rs 340 per quintal for the 2024-25 season starting October. This is the highest FRP for sugarcane announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government since coming to power in 2014.

Dismayed over the decision, Baghpat District President of BharatiyaKisan Union (Bhanu) Pratap Singh Gurjar said the government has forgotten its own promise.

"Prime Minister NarendraModi had himself promised to give MSP of Rs 450 per quintal to cane during a public rally in Meerut in 2014 elections," he claimed.

"We (farmers) are also consumers. The government should also remember this. We also have to buy petrol, diesel, fertiliser, seeds etc.

All these things are becoming expensive. MSP on sugarcane should be increased on the basis of farmers' costs. If the allowance of government employees increases on the basis of inflation, then why is it not done for farmers? We urge the central government to reconsider its decision on the price for sugarcane," Gurjar added. Gurwant Singh, a sugarcane farmer of Shahjahanpur district, called the FRP rise "meagre." —*PTI*

Akhilesh, Priyanka to join Nyay Yatra in Agra next week

LUCKNOW, 22 FEB

A day after announcing the seat-sharing arrangement for Uttar Pradesh in LokSabha polls, the Samajwadi Party (SP) on Thursday said its chief AkhileshYadav and Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadrawill attend Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat JodoNyayYatra in Agra on 25February and 24 February respectively. Congress leaders visited SP office in the afternoon and extended an invitation to Yadav to join the yatra in Agra. Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Rai, senior party leader PL Punia and others visited the SP office here with the invitation letter from Party President Mallikarjun Kharge. —*PTI*

Odisha needs double engine 'Sarkar', says Rajnath Singh

BERHAMPUR, 22 FEB

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said a "double engine" government should be installed in Odisha for steady progress along with the rest of the country.Singh said this while addressing a public meeting at Ambapua near Berhampur town here."No force can stop BJP from forming the government in Odisha this time," he said. He urged party workers to visit every household and inform people about the welfare measures taken by the Modi government for the poor, farmers, laboureres, students, and youths. Singh appealed to BJP workers to take the pledge of forming a "double-engine sarkar" in Odisha."We will not only do well in LokSabha polls, but BJP will also do well in the VidhanSabha polls," he asserted. —*PTI*

Moitra's plea alleging media leak: Delhi HC to pass order today

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Delhi High Court on Thursday said it will pass an order on Friday on TMC leader MahuaMoitra's plea against the alleged leakage of "confidential" information from the Enforcement Directorate (ED)to the media in relation to a probe against her under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA). Senior Counsel appearing for Moitraclaimed she was being "hounded", and information on issuance of summons to her by the agency was published by the media even before she received them.Justice Subramonium Prasad orally remarked that as of now, there was nothing as the news report in question made factual assertions."That is news. You are a public person. It is only a factual assertion... As of now, there is nothing," the judge remarked. —*PTI*

Mallikarjun Kharge given Z-plus security

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Ahead of the LokSabha elections, Congress president MallikarjunKharge has been granted Z-plus security across the country by the Union home ministry, official sources said Thursday. The decision was taken by the home ministry early this month based on the threat perception of Kharge, they said. Commandos of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) will provide the Z-plus security to Kharge on all India basis, the sources said. As president of the principal opposition party, Kharge is expected to tour across the country extensively in the run-up to the general elections as well as during the polls and the decision to enhance his security cover was taken keeping in view this fact, the sources said.Kharge will now be covered by a security blanket of about 30 CRPF commandoes round the clock in three shifts. This cover also includes a bulletproof vehicle, pilot and escort. The Z-plus is the highest category security provided to a person of high threat perception in India. —***PTI***

Make 'Amul' producer world's biggest dairy company: Modi

AHMEDABAD, 22 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday appealed to farmers and other stakeholders associated with the cooperative sector to make Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which owns the 'Amul' brand, the world's number one dairy company from its current eighth position.

He was addressing nearly one lakh people, mostly cattle rearers and farmers, gathered at the Modi stadium in Motera area of Ahmedabad for the golden jubilee celebration of GCMMF. Modi said it is growing at a rate of 6 per cent per annum while the global dairy sector is growing at 2 per cent. "Amul was established as Kaira District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union under the guidance of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and later on the GCMMF came into existence," Modi said.

Narendra Modi **PHOTO: PTI**

Modi also said government was giving priority to every aspect linked to villages and also focusing on improving the lives of small farmers.

Modi to launch development projects worth Rs 34,400 crore

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address a 'Viksit Bharat Viksit Chhattisgarh' programme on Saturday via video and launch development projects worth over Rs 34,400 crore. —*PTI*

ED summons Kejriwal, AAP alleges political interference

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Directorate of Enforcement (ED) has issued its seventh summons to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, responding to this, Delhi Minister Gopal Rai on Wednesday said that the Delhi Chief Minister would respond to the summons after legal consultations.

"After having legal consultation we'll reply to the ED summon that came today," GopalRai said.

Responding to the summons from the agency, AAP leader and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj alleged that the summons was political in nature.

Earlier in the day, the Directorate of Enforcement issued the seventh summons to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to appear before the agency. Sources say the Delhi CM has been asked to appear before the ED on 26 February.

Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

On 14 February, ED had issued a sixth summons to the Delhi Chief Minister in the money laundering probe related to alleged irregularities in the Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22 case, asking him to join the investigation on 19 February.

The fresh summons to the Delhi Chief Minister was issued after he skipped the fifth summons on 2 February.

AravindKejriwal had earlier skipped five previous summons issued by the ED on 2 February, 18 January, 3 January, 2 November and 22 December, calling them "illegal and politically motivated." —*ANI*

Atishi claims Kejriwal will be arrested if AAP & Cong tie up

New Delhi, 22 Feb

AAP leader Atishi claimed on Thursday that Delhi Chief Minister ArvindKejriwal will be arrested in the next three to four days if the party enters into a seat-sharing agreement with the Congress for the LokSabha polls. She also claimed that CBI was going to issue a notice to Kejriwal. "Since the news of discussions on an alliance between AAP and Congress reaching final stages is circulating, AAP leaders have received messages since Wednesday evening that Kejriwal will be arrested if AAP enters into a seat-sharing agreement with the Congress," she claimed. —*PTI*

SANDESHKHALI ROW

Bengal BJP chief detained while protesting

KOLKATA, 22 FEB

West Bengal BJP President Sukanta Majumdar was taken into custody by West Bengal Police after he sat on a protest demanding the arrest of TMC leader Shahjahan Sheikh in violence-hit Sandeshkhali of North 24 Parganas district.

After receiving permission from the police to visit the trouble-torn area in Sandeshkhali on Thursday, Majumdar staged a protest against TMC leader in front of a police station in Sandeshkhali. BJP State president who was accompanied by a slew of security personnel had arrived at violence-hit Sandeshkhali after police permission and was seen interacting with the women of Sandeshkhali there.

Earlier in the day, Majumdar went to visit the arrested party workers in prison in the Basirhaat area of the district. While speaking to ANI on his visit to the arrested party workers, BJP state president SukantaMajumdar said, "They (jail administration) didn't permit to go inside. I will meet them (Party workers) from outside just like a common family."

Sukanta Majumdar **PHOTO: ANI**

Majumdaralso said, "We have given in writing that we want to meet Vikas Singh and 11 other party workers, they're innocent and have done nothing wrong. They (administration) said that only local MP is allowed to meet, I asked them to show me the Act where it is written. As an MP, it's a legal right that I can visit the jail. I am here till the jailer's sense prevails, but it seems those who are on the other side of the call aren't allowing it. For Mamata Banerjee, her will is the constitution." —*ANI*

CALCUTTA HC GRANTS BAIL TO SCRIBE

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Calcutta high court on Thursday granted bail to a television journalist, who was arrested by the West Bengal Police in the restive Sandeshkhali area. Court also ordered a stay on further proceedings in the case registered against Santu Pan at Sandeshkhali police station. Justice KausikChanda granted bail to the journalist, who works for Republic Bangla, on a petition moved by him. Police arrested Pan on Monday from Sandeshkhali. He was remanded to police custody for three days by a local court in North 24 Parganas district on Tuesday. Pan was arrested on the basis of a complaint by a woman alleging that he had trespassed into her house. —*PTI*

BJP releases docu on crimes against women

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

BJP on Thursday released a documentary on its social media handles to highlight the alleged land grab and sexual exploitation of women at Sandeshkhali in West Bengal and attacked the state's Trinamool Congress (TMC) government.BJP said on X about the over 20-minute long video, "A truth that'll shock us. A truth that'll pain us.A truth that'll shake our conscience. The truth of #Sandeshkhali, that Mamata Banerjee is trying to hide..."The documentary has several Sandeshkhali women speaking of the crimes they were subjected to.TMC has accused BJP of being behind the allegations.BJP, the main Opposition party in the state, has seized on the issue to mount a strong attack on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her party in the run up to LokSabha polls.TMC leader Sheikh Shahjahan and his supporters of land grab and sexual assault under coercion.Shahjahan is absconding following his suspected involvement in a violent attack on Enforcement Directorate officials who had gone to raid his house in connection with a corruption case. —*PTI*

Sikhs protest over Khalistani remark

KOLKATA, 22 FEB

Representatives of the Sikh community on Thursday called on West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose to protest against alleged "Khalistani" jibe at an IPS officer by BJP leader SuvenduAdhikari.

Sikh IPS officer Jaspreet Singh has claimed that Adhikari, leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly, had used the term "Khalistani" against him when he was halted by the police while en route to restive Sandeshkhali on Tuesday.

Though BJP leader denied making any such comment, the matter escalated to a major row.

"The manner in which SuvenduAdhikari used the term Khalistani against the IPS officer is insulting. It hurt the sentiment of every member of the Sikh community," a spokesperson of the community told reporters near Raj Bhavan after meeting Bose.

Jaspreet Singh cannot be called a "Khalistani" just because he wears a turban, said the spokesperson who represented members of seven Gurudwaras of Kolkata.

"Sikhs in the country will not take this lying down," the spokesperson said.

Bose, as the constitutional head of West Bengal, was urged to write a letter to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee about the "humiliation caused to a Sikh IPS officer on duty and appropriately address the grievances of the community," the spokesperson added. —*PTI*

NCPCR directs FIR against Darul Uloom Deoband

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

The apex child rights body National Commission for Protection of Child Rights has issued directive to the Uttar Pradesh government to register an FIR and take legal action against Darul Uloom Deoband, a Islamic educational institution, following the discovery of alleged objectionable content on its website. In a letter addressed to the senior SSP Priyank Kanoongo highlighted the commission's concern regarding a fatwa published on the Deoband's portal. —*PTI*

41% FROM BJP

12 of 23 MPs have criminal charges: ADR

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Of the 23 MPs re-elected between 2004 and 2019 LokSabha polls, 12 of them have declared criminal cases against them, poll rights body ADR has said in its new analysis.

Top re-elected MPs with the highest increase in assets include Jigajinagi Ramesh Chandappa, Maneka Sanjay Gandhi, and RaoInderjit Singh, whose assets witnessed substantial growth over the years.

The analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and the National Election Watch showed that nine of these MPs have serious criminal cases, including charges related to murder, attempt to murder, and dacoity.

PHOTO: PTI

The report also delves into party-wise statistics, revealing that a significant percentage of re-elected MPs from various parties, including the BJP, Congress, AIMIM, and Shiv Sena, have declared criminal cases against them in their affidavits.

- Of the 23 MPs re-elected between 2004 and 2019 LokSabha polls, 12 of them have declared criminal cases against them, poll rights body ADR has said in its new analysis.

"Seven (41 per cent) out of 17 re-elected MPs from the BJP, three (100 per cent) out of three re-elected MPs from INC, one (100 per cent) re-elected MP from AIMIM and one (100%) re-elected MP from SHS have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits," it said.

One of the most striking findings of the analysis is the exponential growth in the assets of re-elected MPs over the years.

The average asset growth for these MPs between 2004 and 2019 stands at staggering Rs 15.98 crore, representing a 1,045 per cent increase.

The ADR and the National Election Watch urged stakeholders to closely examine these findings and take the necessary steps to address the underlying issues, ensuring a more transparent and accountable political environment. —*PTI*

BJP doors closed for Kamal Nath: MP min

JABALPUR, 22 FEB

Madhya Pradesh Minister Kailash Vijayvargiyahas asserted that BJP does not need Kamal Nath and its doors are closed for him, amid suspense over the next political move of the senior Congress leader.]He was reacting to queries over speculation that Nath might join his party.

"I had said there is no need of Kamal Nath in our party and that's why its doors were closed for him," he told reporters here on Wednesday. Speculations are rife ever since former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Nath and his son MP NakulNath reached New Delhi last week. However, Nath confidant Sajjan Singh Verma had denied reports that the 77-year-old veteran Congress leader would join BJP.

Amid the suspense over Nath's next political move, several local leaders of the party from his stronghold of MP's Chhindwara district joined the BJP on Wednesday.

To a question about Digvijaya Singh's comments concerning extradition of fugitive diamond merchant NiravModi, Vijayvargiya said the senior Congress leader and others like him were frustrated. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

1 foreigner dead, 1 injured as avalanche hits Gulmarg resort

GULMARG, 22 FEB

An avalanche hit the Gulmarg ski resort in Jammu and Kashmir, trapping three foreigners under snow, officials said on Thursday. According to the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Baramulla, one of the trapped foreigners has been confirmed dead while another is believed to have sustained serious injuries. Further, the officials said the third person is feared missing in the wake of the incident. A chopper (see pic) was put into use. The DDMA informed further that the avalanche was recorded around 2pm." Around 2pm, an avalanche was recorded in Gulmarg, trapping three foreigners. Tragically, one among them is dead, one injured, and another remains missing," the DDMA, Baramulla, informed through an official statement.Rescue operations were underway at the time of filing this report.*—ANI*

8-yr-old gangraped in UP, victim's mother arrested

LUCKNOW, 22 FEB

Police have arrested a cleric and are on a lookout for his brother in connection with a gang-rape case of an eight-year-old girl here, officials said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Vishwajeet Srivastava said a man got a complaint filed at the Malihabad police station a few days ago, alleging that his eight-year-old daughter was raped by two men who teach in a madrasa. The two accused were identified as Mohammed Abedin and his brother, Mohammad Arshad, the officials said. Based on the complaint, police lodged an FIR under section 376D (gang rape) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act against the accused. The DCP said police arrested Abedin and the victim's mother on Wednesday. *—PTI*

Man held for impersonating cop at HSC exam

AKOLA, 22 FEB

Police have arrested a 24-year-old man for impersonating a cop at an HSC exam centre in Maharashtra's Akola district, an official said on Thursday.The man, Anupam Madan Khandare, was trying to help his sister, who was taking the state board's Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC or Class 12) exams, the official said. Donning a fake khaki uniform, Khandare walked into a centre at Shahbabu Urdu High School in Patur town on Wednesday.The cops on the spot quickly realised that Khandare was wearing a fake uniform as it was shabbily stitched. The official said Khandare had come to pass chits to his sister and was arrested for cheating and personating a government servant.*—PTI*

Strategic roads in North and East Sikkim blocked

GANGTOK, 22 FEB

Several strategically important roads in North and East Sikkim are blocked due to heavy snowfall, the Border Road Organisation (BRO) said in a statement on Thursday. Strategically important roads along Lachung and Lachen axis and the national highway to Nathu La and Tamze have experienced exceptionally heavy snowfall causing disruption of socio-economic activities and posing a challenge to all road users."Due to disturbance from western Himalayan region, the weather in Sikkim has taken turn and parts of Sikkim is getting snowfall," it said. *—PTI*

AFTER SATYA PAL MALIK RAPS GOVT, CBI RAIDS HIM

The agency searched houses of five people in connection with the case

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Satya Pal Malik, had claimed that he was offered a Rs 300-crore bribe for clearing two files, including the one pertaining to the project *PHOTO: PTI*

- The case pertains to alleged corruption in awarding a civil-work contract related to the Kiru Hydro Electric Power Project (HEP) worth Rs 2,200 crore, the officials said. The searches also covered the premises of alleged associates of Malik, former chairman of the Chenab Valley Power Projects Navin Kumar Chaudhary

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) conducted searches at the premises of former Jammu and Kashmir governor Satya Pal Malik and 29 other locations on Thursday in connection with alleged corruption in the Rs 2,200-crore Kiru Hydropower project, officials said.

The federal agency started its operation in the morning, with around 100 officers mobilised to swoop down at the 30 locations in multiple cities of Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, besides Delhi and Mumbai, the officials said.

The searches also covered the premises of alleged associates of Malik, former chairman of the Chenab Valley Power Projects Private Limited Navin Kumar Chaudhary and officials of Patel Engineering Limited, the officials said.

"I have been ill for the last three-four days and am admitted to the hospital. Despite this, my house is being raided by the dictator through government agencies. My driver and my assistant are also being raided and harassed unnecessarily. I am a farmer's son, I will not be afraid of these raids. I am with the farmers," Malik said in a post on X.

The case pertains to alleged corruption in awarding a civil-work contract related to the Kiru Hydro Electric Power Project (HEP) worth Rs 2,200 crore, the officials said.

Malik, who was the governor of Jammu and Kashmir from 23 August, 2018 to 30 October, 2019, had claimed that he was offered a Rs 300-crore bribe for clearing two files, including the one pertaining to the project.

"The case was registered on allegations of malpractices in the award of the contract worth approximately Rs 2,200 crore of civil works of the Kiru Hydro Electric Power Project (HEP) to a private company in 2019," the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had said earlier.

"Though a decision was taken in the 47th board meeting of CVPPPL (Chenab Valley Power Projects (P) Ltd) for re-tender through e-tendering with a reverse auction after the cancellation of the ongoing tendering process, the same was not implemented (according to the decision taken in the 48th board meeting) and the tender was finally awarded to Patel Engineering Limited," the FIR has alleged.

The agency had conducted searches at the premises of five people in January in connection with the case. *—PTI*

FAMILIES SEEK HELP

Youths duped to fight Ukraine & Russia war

HYDERABAD, 22 FEB

Mohammad Sufiyan, from Hyderabad, is one of the many youths who were allegedly duped by some agents and drafted into fighting for Russia in the ongoing conflict against Ukraine.

Sufiyan's family has urged the central government as well as the Ministry of External Affairs to safely evacuate the youths trapped in Russia and also take strict action against the agents.

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) MP Asaduddin Owaisi has also pointed out the issue and urged the Centre to talk with the Russian government and bring back the youths.

"The Narendra Modi government should hold talks with the Russian government and bring back the 12 youths trapped in the Russia-Ukraine war," AIMIM posted on X.

Imran, the brother of Sufiyan, told ANI about all the events that happened.

"My brother was taken by Baba Blocks Company, which has offices in Dubai, Delhi, and Mumbai. The first batch went out on 12 November, 2023. A total of 21 youths were sent and Rs 3 lakh was taken from each one of them. They were made to sign an agreement in Russia on 13 November ," he said.

He said that the agents told the youth that they would get the job as army helpers, but were eventually drafted into the army and were deployed inside the Ukrainian borders.

"The agents gave the wrong translations of the documents to them. They were told that it is the job of army helpers. But, two days later, they were taken for military training. Even when the youths protested, the Indian agents again misguided them, saying that it was only part of the training and they wouldn't be sent to the frontlines," Imran said.

He added, "After multiple rounds of training, they were taken near the Ukraine border for training. The distressed youths told the agents that their lives were in danger, but the agents again lied that it was part of training and they would be brought back to Moscow."

—ANI

Netflix's Indrani series on hold till 29 Feb

MUMBAI, 22 FEB

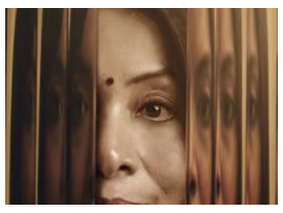


PHOTO: X

Over-the-top (OTT) platform Netflix on Thursday told the Bombay High Court that it would not release the documentary series on Indrani Mukerjea, who is facing trial for allegedly killing her daughter Sheena Bora, till 29 February.

A division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Manjusha Deshpande directed the makers of the series to hold a special screening of the series for the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the prosecuting agency.The docu-series, titled 'The Indrani Mukerjea Story: The Buried Truth', delves into the disappearance of 25-year-old Bora and was scheduled to premiere on streaming platform Netflix on 23 February (Friday).The CBI had filed a petition in the Hhigh Ccourt, seeking a stay on its release till the trial in the case is complete.The bench on Thursday sought to know from the makers of the series if it was willing to hold a screening of the series for the CBI."Senior counsel Ravi Kadam, appearing for Netflix, initially opposed and said this would amount to pre-censorship. *—PTI*

FEMA VIOLATIONS

ED searches Hiranandani Group premises in Mumbai

NEW DELHI,22 FEB

The Directorate of Enforcement (ED) is conducting searches at multiple premises of the Hiranandani Group *PHOTO: X*

The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday searched four to five premises of prominent real estate group Hiranandani in and around Mumbai on charges of foreign exchange violations, official sources said.

The probe pertains to alleged contravention of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), the sources said. It is not linked to another FEMA investigation against TMC leader Mahua Moitra who was expelled as a Lok Sabha MP recently.

BJP MP Nishikant Dubey had accused Moitra of asking questions in Lok Sabha to target the Adani group and Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the behest of businessman Darshan Hiranandani in exchange for gifts.

Darshan Hiranandani is the son of real estate tycoon and promoter of the Hiranandani group, Niranjan Hiranandani.

Dubey had also accused Moitra of compromising national security for monetary gains.

Moitra has denied any wrongdoing and claimed she was being targeted as she had raised questions on the deals of the Adani group. *—PTI*

Nuh violence: Cong MLA charged with UAPA

NUH, 22 FEB

Charges under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) have been slapped against Congress MLA Mamman Khan in Haryana in connection with the Nuh violence case.

The charges have been slapped against the Ferozpur Jhirka MLA in a case lodged at the Nagina police station here.

Police have added charges under anti-terror law UAPA to the First Information Report (FIR), Khan's counsel said on Wednesday.

Police had earlier accused Khan of inciting violence and being in touch with those involved in sharing provocative posts on social media platforms.

Besides, he also faces some other charges in the FIR.

Khan was arrested last year in connection with the Nuh violence case and granted bail by a court subsequently.

Tahir Hussain Rupariya, the counsel of the accused, said he had sought a status report from the court and the document revealed that charges under the UAPA have been added to the FIR.

Meanwhile, speaking in the Haryana Assembly during the on-going budget session, Congress MLA from Nuh Aftab Ahmed questioned why the UAPA has been invoked in three cases registered at the Nuh police station and another at the Nagina police station after the challan was presented in the court.

He said the UAPA is invoked against terrorists. *—PTI*

EAM holds bilateral talks with Tanzania, Ghana, Slovak Republic

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

On the side lines of the Raisina Dialogue in Delhi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday held bilateral meetings with his counterparts from Slovak Republic, Ghana and Tanzania and discussed cooperation with both countries in multiple sectors.

EAM Jaishankar held a meeting with the Foreign Minister of Ghana, Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey and assessed the progress of India-Ghana bilateral cooperation, especially the development of partnership.

—ANI

Jaishankar to visit Japan, South Korea

New Delhi, 22 Feb

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will embark on a four-day visit to South Korea and Japan beginning 4 March to hold talks with his interlocutors on key bilateral, regional and global issues, including the challenges in the Indo-Pacific.Jaishankar's visit to the Republic of Korea and Japan, two of India's major partners, will impart further momentum to bilateral exchanges and set the agenda for future cooperation, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

—PTI

HC JUNKS NOTICE AGAINST RHEA IN SSR CASE

MUMBAI, 22 FEB

The Bombay High Court on Thursday quashed the Look Out Circulars (LOCs) issued against Rhea Chakraborty, her brother and father by the CBI in connection with its probe into the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput.

A division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Manjusha Deshpande allowed the petitions filed by Rhea Chakraborty, her brother Showik and their father Indrajit against the LOCs issued against them. *—PTI*

Govt decides to continue women safety scheme till 2025-26

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

The Centre has decided to continue its flagship scheme for women safety with an approval of Rs 1,179.72 crore till 2025-26.

The Union Cabinet took the decision on Wednesday night in an effort to check incidents of crime against women in the country.

According to the latest record of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a total of 4,45,256 cases of crime against women were registered across India in 2022 -- almost 51 FIRs every hour on an average.

The figure was 4,28,278 in 2021 and 3,71,503 in 2020.

A meeting of the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the proposal of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for the continuation of the umbrella scheme on "Safety of Women" at a total cost of Rs 1,179.72 crore from 2021-22 to 2025-26, an official release said.Of the total project outlay of Rs 1,179.72 crore, an amount of Rs 885.49 crore will be provided by the MHA from its own budget and Rs 294.23 crore will be channelised from the Nirbhaya Fund.

Stringent deterrence in matters related to offences against women has been provided through amendments in the Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure and Indian Evidence Act. The Centre has proposed to continue a number of projects under the umbrella scheme for "Safety of Women".

Kerala works on equal pay

Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday said a gender audit will be conducted in workplaces and steps will be taken to ensure equal pay for women, on par with men.

"Jobs should be made more favorable for women. For that, gender audit will be conducted in workplaces and equal pay will be ensured," Vijayan said. *—PTI*

SWEET DEATH?

Beloved cotton candy can be a harbinger of cancer

MUMBAI, 22 FEB

The union territory of Puducherry banned the sweet treat while other states have begun testing samples of it *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

- Cotton candy, also called buddi-ka-baal (old woman's hair) in India because of its appearance, is popular with children the world over

Can cotton candy give you cancer?

Some Indian states think so and have banned the sale of the pink, wispy, sugary-sweet treat.

Last week, the southern state of Tamil Nadu implemented the ban after lab tests confirmed the presence of a cancer-causing substance, Rhodamine-B, in samples sent for testing.

Earlier this month, the union territory of Puducherry banned the sweet treat while other states have begun testing samples of it.

Cotton candy, also called buddi-ka-baal (old woman's hair) in India because of its appearance, is popular with children the world over.

But some Indian officials say that the candy is more sinister than it seems.

P Satheesh Kumar, food safety officer in Chennai city in Tamil Nadu, told The Indian Express newspaper that the contaminants in cotton candy "could lead to cancer and affect all organs of the body".

His team raided candy sellers at a beach in the city last week. Kumar said the sweet sold in the city was made by independent sellers and not registered factories.

A few days later, the government announced a ban on its sale after lab tests detected the presence of Rhodamine-B, a chemical compound, in the samples. The chemical imparts a fluorescent pink hue and is used to dye textiles, cosmetics and inks.

Studies have shown that the chemical can increase the risk of cancer and Europe and California have made its use as a food dye illegal.

While banning cotton candy in Tamil Nadu, Health Minister Ma Subramanian said in a statement that using Rhodamine-B in the "packaging, import, sale of food or serving food containing it at weddings and other public events would be punishable under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006".

Taking a cue from Tamil Nadu, the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh has also reportedly started testing samples of the candy to check for the presence of the carcinogen.

And earlier this week, the New India Express newspaper reported that food safety officials in Delhi too were pushing for a ban on cotton candy.

—BBC News

All Apogee Motor firings of INSAT-3DS completed

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Days after the successful launch of its meteorological satellite INSAT-3DS, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said on Thursday that all four planned Liquid Apogee Motor (LAM) firings of the mission are completed.

It further stated that the spacecraft is now in the geosynchronous orbit.

"INSAT-3DS update: All four planned Liquid Apogee Motor (LAM) firings are completed. The spacecraft is now in the geosynchronous orbit," ISRO posted on 'X,' formerly Twitter.

It is expected to reach the In-Orbit Testing (IOT) location by 28 February, the post added.On 17 February, ISRO conducted the successful launch of INSAT-3DS aboard GSLV F14 at 5.35pm from the Sriharikota spaceport in Andhra Pradesh.The satellite will study weather forecasts and natural disaster warnings.The INSAT-3DS Satellite is a follow-on mission of Third Generation Meteorological Satellite from Geostationary Orbit.

The mission is fully funded by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).

It is designed for enhanced meteorological observations and monitoring of land and ocean surfaces for weather forecasting and disaster warning. The satellite will augment the Meteorological services along with the presently operational INSAT-3D and INSAT-3DR satellites.

The objectives of the mission are to monitor Earth's surface, and carry out oceanic and its environment in various spectral channels of meteorological importance -- to provide vertical profile of meteorological parameters. *—ANI*

OPERATION DRILL

A glimpse of an operational demonstration by Andaman and Nicobar Command at Radhanagar beach, Swaraj Dweep Island, in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Integral combat platforms and forces of the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) demonstrated their multi-dimensional operational capabilities, including a coordinated landing by amphibious platforms of the Command.
PHOTO: PTI

2010 MSP rejection comes back to haunt Congress

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, reacting to the ongoing farmer protest, asserted that the party, if voted to power, would give a legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP) to every farmer as per the Swaminathan Commission.

In a post on X, Rahul said "Farmer brothers, today is a historic day! Congress has decided to give a legal guarantee of MSP to every farmer on crops as per the Swaminathan Commission. This step will change the lives of 15 crore farmer families by ensuring their prosperity. This is the first guarantee of Congress on the path of justice."

Even as the Congress leader was making these promises a note from 2010 punched a hole in the Congress' gameplan. The 2010 note of the then United Progressive Alliance (UPA) showed that the government had rejected recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission regarding MSP saying that a mechanical linkage between MSP and production costs could distort the market dynamics.

Then minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, KV Thomas had informed the Rajya Sabha that the recommendation was not accepted by the government because "MSP is recommended by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) based on objective criteria and considering a variety of relevant factors."

"Hence, prescribing an increase of at least 50 per cent on cost may distort the market. A mechanical linkage between MSP and cost of production may be counter-productive in some cases," the response had added.

Meanwhile senior leader and Rajya Sabha MP Jairam Ramesh continues to question the BJP over the non implementation of the report.

"According to the Swaminathan Commission, the MSP of wheat should be Rs 2,478 per quintal which is only Rs 2,275 per quintal. Similarly, the MSP of paddy is only Rs 2,183 per quintal instead of Rs 2,866 per quintal. Modi ji, why didn't you implement the findings of your own 2011 report? Why did you lie to the farmers by repeatedly promising MSP? Today the farmers of India have lost faith in the Modi government. It is only the Congress Party Kisaan Nyay Guarantee that will give legal guarantee of MSP to the farmers on Swaminathan formula" Ramesh said in a post of X.

The farmers have put forth 12 demands before the central government for which they're marching to Delhi.

The protest this time has been called by Sanyukt Kisan Morcha and Punjab Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee led by farmer union leaders Jagjeet Singh Dallewal and Sarwan Singh Pandher.

According to the protesting farmers, the centre promised them better crop prices, after which they ended the 2021 protest.

Farmers have been deemanding to enact a law guaranteeing a minimum support price (MSP) for all crops, as recommended by the Swaminathan Commission report
PHOTO: ANI

- The protesting farmers urged to scrap the Electricity Amendment Bill 2020 and are demanding to punish those involved in the Lakhimpur Kheri killings. An appeal to provide 200 days of employment per year and a daily wage of Rs 700 under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA), linking it with farming, has also been made by the farmers

They are demanding to enact a law guaranteeing a minimum support price (MSP) for all crops, as recommended by the Swaminathan Commission report.

They are also demanding a complete debt waiver and a scheme to provide pensions to farmers and farm labourers.

The farmers have also urged to scrap the Electricity Amendment Bill 2020 and are demanding to reintroduce the Land Acquisition Act of 2013, ensuring consent from farmers and compensation at 4 times the collector rate.

Further, they are demanding to punish those involved in the Lakhimpur Kheri killings. An appeal to provide 200 days of employment per year and a daily wage of Rs 700 under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA), linking it with farming, has also been made by the farmers.

Also, they have demanded compensation to the families of farmers who died during the protests in 2021 and a job for any family member has been put in place.
—ANI

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR ساڵار

Five ways to prevent premature baby deaths

Worldwide in 2020 a baby died every 40 seconds because of complications of prematurity. Preterm birth is the leading cause of death among children under 5 years old.

The burden of preterm birth is heavier in in low- and middle-income countries, where around 80 per cent occur. The countries with the highest recorded preterm rates in Africa are Malawi, South Africa, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Botswana. In Ethiopia 12.9 per cent of babies were born preterm in 2020. In Nigeria the figure was 9.9 per cent.

Preterm birth occurs when a baby is born before 37 weeks' gestation. Preterm babies are more at risk of severe neurological problems, like cerebral palsy, poor lung function and long-term problems with their guts. But around 95 per cent of babies born preterm are born after 28 weeks. They often survive with relatively less complex medical interventions.

Given the scale of the problem, the preterm birth committee of the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics selected five key interventions known to save lives.

We co-authored a recent paper in which we discussed the five measures. There are many other interventions that may improve outcomes at the time of labour and after preterm birth. But the five selected are clinically effective and relatively inexpensive options that can be practised in most settings.

Five interventions

The five interventions are:

1.) Giving a course of steroids before the baby is born. This triggers changes in the baby's lungs, allowing them to expand, and so makes breathing easier. Additionally, it reduces the risk of brain bleeds, bowel complications and death.

- Delayed cord clamping for at least a minute postnatally at delivery- When a baby is born their umbilical cord is clamped and then cut. However, a delay of around a minute before clamping is associated with a reduction in neonatal death. It also reduces the need for medications to support blood pressure in the baby – something that cannot be offered outside highly specialist medical facilities

A study run by the World Health Organization in low- and middle-income countries estimated 370,000 babies could be saved each year if steroids were administered.

The drug is on the WHO List of Essential Medications. It is relatively easy to administer and carries a low risk of causing the mother any problems. It is also heat stable and does not require refrigeration, which is very important for environments where electricity is in short supply.

2.) Mothers can be given magnesium sulphate soon before delivery. This is known to stabilise cell membranes in the baby. This protects neurons and therefore reduces brain damage. Magnesium sulphate given to a mother in preterm labour can be lifesaving.

This drug is also on the WHO List of Essential Medications and appropriate for low income environments.

3.) Delayed cord clamping for at least a minute postnatally at delivery.

When a baby is born their umbilical cord is clamped and then cut. However, a delay of around a minute before clamping is associated with a reduction in neonatal death. It also reduces the need for medications to support blood pressure in the baby – something that cannot be offered outside highly specialist medical facilities.

4.) Encouraging breast feeding within one hour of delivery.

Breastfeeding is particularly beneficial for premature babies, reducing the risks of serious complications of prematurity like severe infection or a serious bowel condition called necrotising enterocolitis that often requires surgery as a lifesaving measure.

5.) Strongly encouraging immediate "kangaroo care".

Kangaroo care involves a baby being placed skin-to-skin on the chest of its mother or another family member for extended periods of time – at least eight hours a day, but for as long as possible.

Premature babies are very prone to getting very cold. Kangaroo care reduces the risk of death. This has been found to be the case even if there aren't other options to stabilise the baby.Kangaroo care also reduces the risk of infection and improves rates of breastfeeding.

Beyond the benefits for the baby, both kangaroo care and breastfeeding play an important part in involving parents in the care of their infant, and in reducing rates of maternal postnatal depression.

The risk of postnatal depression is known to be higher following a preterm birth.

Courtesy, The Conversation

Preterm babies are more at risk of severe neurological problems, like cerebral palsy, poor lung function and long-term problems with their guts
PHOTO: PTI

Dating apps fuelling addiction: What makes us keep swiping?

A class-action lawsuit filed in the United States against Match Group – the parent company of dating apps Tinder, Hinge and The League – is making headlines around the world.

The claimants accuse Match of having a "predatory" business model and using "recognised dopamine-manipulating product features" to get people addicted to their apps.

So, can dating apps really be addictive? Are we swiping right into a trap? Here's the science behind how dating apps are influencing our brains.

How do apps give us a dopamine hit?

Dating apps, like many apps these days, are designed to keep users engaged. Like any product on the market, one of the developers' goals is for the app to be sold and used.

While dating apps are designed to facilitate connections, some people may find themselves developing an unhealthy relationship with the app, constantly swiping left and right.

Dating apps can feel addictive because they activate the dopamine reward system. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter – a chemical messenger in the brain, one of many such chemicals essential for our survival.

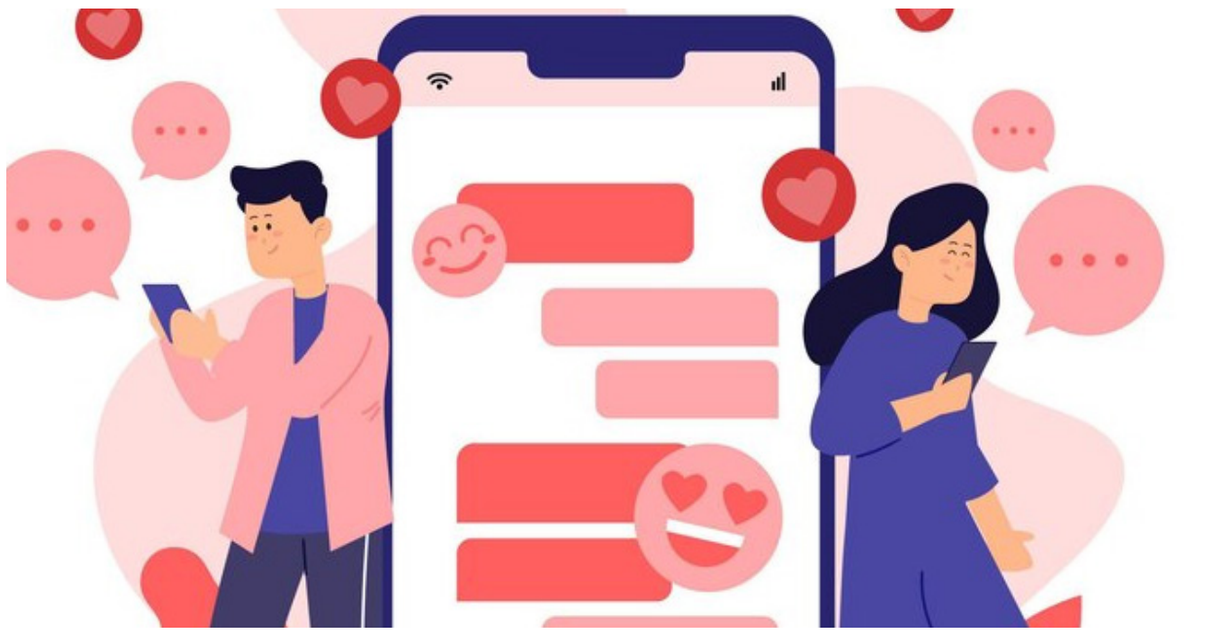
One of dopamine's crucial roles is to influence when and how we experience pleasure and reward. Think about the rush of winning money at a casino, or getting lots of likes on Instagram. That's dopamine working its magic.

However, dopamine does more that just help us feel pleasure and excitement. It also has a key role in motivating us to seek out pleasurable things. It's released not only when we experience something pleasurable, but also when we're anticipating and seeking out a pleasurable experience.

Excitement and unpredictability

Certain app features make it more likely we will open our phones and start swiping. When you get a match on a dating app, it feels exciting – that's dopamine at work.

But an element of unpredictability adds to this excitement. Each time you open the app, you don't know what profiles you might see, and who might match with you. This element of surprise and anticipation is especially important in getting us hooked.



While dating apps are designed to facilitate connections, some people may find themselves developing an unhealthy relationship with the app, constantly swiping left and right
PHOTO: FREEPIK

Imagine if instead of swiping through profiles one by one, you were shown a long list of them at once. It would still feel good to match with people, but that excitement and anticipation of swiping through one by one would be missing.

Additionally, intermittent reinforcement comes into the mix. This is where "rewards" – in this case, matches – are provided at irregular intervals. We know we might eventually get some matches, but we don't know when or with whom.

Imagine if instead of being drip-fed your matches, you received a list of any matches from the past 24 hours, at 9am each day. Your excitement and desire to check the app throughout the day would likely lessen.

Other small features, such as "hearts" and "roses", make dating apps socially rewarding.

These are all forms of approval. It feels different to receive a heart or a rose compared to something unemotional like a "tick" or "thumbs up". These social stimuli are rewarding and activate our dopamine, too.

Not every dating app user will develop an unhealthy relationship to it. Just like not everyone who gambles, plays mobile games, or drinks alcohol develops a problem with those.

However, some people are biologically more vulnerable to addictions than others. A review of the research into problematic dating app use found the people likely to spend more time on the apps are those high on personality traits such as neuroticism, sociability and sensation-seeking. Problematic use of online dating apps is also associated with low self-esteem.While there's no current diagnosis of a "dating app addiction", some people do develop unhealthy app habits and experience day-to-day harms as a result.

These six "addiction components" outline some of the signs you might be developing an unhealthy relationship with dating apps:So, what can you do if you find yourself swiping through those matches more than you'd prefer?

Consider taking a break from the apps for a period of time. Depending on how hooked you feel, stopping completely for a while will help you reset your reliance on them.

Consider what is driving you to spend time swiping: are you feeling bored, sad or lonely? What other ways can you find to soothe these emotional experiences instead of turning to the app?

Make a list of the practical or emotional consequences of swiping, as a reminder of why you want to reduce your use. Perhaps the apps give you a brief rush, but in the long run don't align with how you want to be spending your time, or don't make you feel particularly good about yourself.If you really do feel hooked, it will feel uncomfortable to take a break.

Strategies such as mindfulness can help us sit with the discomfort. Consider seeking out professional help from a psychologist if you're struggling to take time from dating apps.

Lastly, remember that apps, while great for meeting people, are not the be-all and end-all of dating. In-person events and opportunities to mingle still exist. So, step away from the screen and embrace the excitement, unpredictability and dopamine hit you can get from face-to-face encounters too.

Courtesy, The Conversation

Covid vaccines linked to heart, brain disorders: Study

WASHINGTON, 22 FEB

Covid vaccines from companies like Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca were linked to rare occurrences of heart, brain and blood disorders, a recent peer-reviewed study found, though experts say the risks of developing Covid-19 greatly outweigh the risks of getting vaccinated.

Big number
13.5 billion. That's how many Covid vaccines have been administered worldwide since the start of the Covid pandemic, according to science research organization Our World in Data. Around 71% of the world's population has received at least one dose of a Covid vaccine.

Crucial quote
"The odds of all of these adverse events is still much, much higher when infected with SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19), so getting vaccinated is still by far the safer choice," CEO of biotechnology company Centivax Jacob Glanville, who is not involved in the study, told Forbes.

Key background
Covid vaccines are meant to prevent severe infection, and studies have indicated Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca's vaccines are effective at preventing severe illnesses, hospitalizations and death. Meanwhile, the chances of having a neurological event after a Covid infection were up to 617-fold higher than following Covid vaccination, which suggests "the benefits of vaccination substantially outweigh the risks," according to the Vaccine study researchers.

The risk of developing myocarditis is higher post-Covid infection than after getting a Covid vaccine, according to Akiko Iwasaki, PhD, professor of Immunobiology at Yale University. Myocarditis risk after the second dose of a Covid vaccine is 35.9 per 100,000 people, compared to a 64.9 per 100,000 risk after Covid infection. The risk of developing Guillain-Barre syndrome after Covid infection was six times greater, and the risk of developing it after vaccination was 0.41 times greater than the control group, according to a 2023 study published in Neurology.

Tangent
The rapidly spreading Covid variant JN.1 caused an uptick in cases during the fall and winter months, causing a resurgence of the tripledemic—when cases of Covid, flu and respiratory syncytial virus simultaneously increase. JN.1 made up 96.4% of all cases in the two week period ending in 17 February.

—Courtesy Forbes

Around 71% of the world's population has received at least one dose of a Covid vaccine **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

Archaeological sites in Afghanistan 'bulldozed'

KABUL, 22 FEB

Dozens of archaeological sites in Afghanistan have been bulldozed to allow systematic looting, according to researchers at the University of Chicago. They say their analysis of satellite photos provides the first definitive photographic evidence that looting patterns that began under the previous government have continued since the Taliban returned to power in 2021. Ancient settlements dating back to the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age - some earlier than 1000BC - are among those they say have been damaged. Most of the sites identified are in northern Afghanistan's Balkh region, which more than two millennia ago was the heartland of Bactria. It was one of the richest and most populous regions of ancient Afghanistan under the Achaemenid Empire in the 6th Century BC. ***—BBC News***

PHOTO: NINE

Former Australian bishop charged with rape

SYDNEY, 22 FEB

Australian bishop Christopher Saunders has been charged with rape and a string of historical sex offences - some against children. The 74-year-old was arrested in Broome on Wednesday, after parallel investigations ordered by Western Australian police and the Pope. Saunders has indicated he will plead not guilty to all charges against him. He is one of the most senior Catholic clerics to face charges of this nature. Saunders is charged with two counts of rape, 14 counts of unlawful and indecent assault, and three counts of indecently dealing with a child as a person in authority. The alleged offending occurred in the remote Western Australian towns of Broome, Kununurra and the Aboriginal community of Kalumburu between 2008 and 2014. ***—BBC News***

Alabama pauses IVF after court rulling on embryos

MONTGOMERY, 22 FEB

Alabama's largest hospital paused in vitro fertilisation treatments Wednesday as providers and patients across the state scrambled to assess the impact of a court ruling that said frozen embryos are the legal equivalent of children. The University of Alabama at Birmingham health system said in a statement that it must evaluate whether its patients or doctors could face criminal charges or punitive damages for undergoing IVF treatments. "We are saddened that this will impact our patients' attempt to have a baby through IVF," the statement from spokeswoman Savannah Koplon read. ***—AP***

Venezuela gold mine collapse: At least 14 dead

LA PARAGUA, 22 FEB

The collapse of an illegally operated open-pit gold mine in central Venezuela killed at least 14 people and injured several more, state authorities said Wednesday, as some other officials reported an undetermined number of people could be trapped. Bolivar state Gov. Angel Marcano told local reporters that 14 bodies had been removed so far and authorities knew of at least 11 people injured. "We continue to carry out rescue work," he said, with relatives demanding swift rescue efforts. The accident took place in the Angostura municipality Tuesday, when a wall collapsed at a mine known as Bulla Loca, which can only be reached by an hours-long boat ride. Angostura Mayor Yorgi Arciniega said late Tuesday that he planned to take "some 30 caskets" to a community near the mine, indicating that officials feared the death toll could rise into the dozens. ***—AP***

Biden calls Putin 'crazy SOB'

Biden takes aim at Trump during fundraiser for 2024 elections

SAN FRANCISCO, 22 FEB

During a fundraiser for his re-election campaign Wednesday night, President Joe Biden called Russian President Vladimir Putin a "crazy SOB" and took aim at former President Donald Trump's comments comparing himself to the Russian opposition leader who died last week in an Arctic prison.

Biden was talking about climate change when he said, "We have a crazy SOB like Putin and others, and we always have to worry about nuclear conflict, but the existential threat to humanity is climate." Speaking to donours at a private San Francisco home Wednesday as part of a three-day California swing to raise money for his 2024 reelection campaign, Biden also said he was astounded by recent comments made by his likely Republican challenger.

Trump compared the suspicious prison death of Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny to his own legal troubles in the US Trump was fined $350 million after a New York judge found he lied for years about his wealth on financial statements in his companies. Trump said the ruling was a form of "communism or fascism."

"Some of the things that this fellow's been saying, like he's comparing himself to Navalny and saying that -- because our country's become a communist country, he was persecuted, just like Navalny was persecuted. I don't know where the hell this comes from," Biden said.

"I mean, if I stood here 10, 15 years ago and said any of this, you'd all think I should be committed," he said. "It astounds me." "I've been around a long time and I've never quite seen a crowd like this MAGA Republican crowd," Biden added, referring to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan. "They seem to have very little moral compass on what is important to people."

During a campaign fundraiser in Beverly Hills on Tuesday night, Biden highlighted his efforts to help middle-class Americans and warned that a win in November for Trump could lead to a nationwide abortion ban, more Republican efforts to undo the health insurance program started during President Barack Obama's administration and more policies that would disproportionately help the wealthy. ***—AP***

During a fundraiser for re-election campaign, President Joe Biden called Russian President Vladimir Putin a 'crazy SOB' **PHOTO: PTI**

'Russia threatening to strike aircraft patrolling Black Sea'

Paris, 22 Feb

Russian forces threatened to shoot down French flights patrolling last month in international airspace over the Black Sea, signals of a "particularly aggressive" posture from Moscow as its invasion of Ukraine struggles to make headway, France's defense minister said Thursday. The minister, Sébastien Lecornu, didn't give specific details about the French flights or aircraft involved in the threatened shootdown. But he said Russia was returning to a "particularly aggressive" posture reminiscent of the former Soviet Union's behaviour during the Cold War. ***—AP***

Farmers' protests: Zelenskyy calls Polish leaders

KYIV, 22 FEB

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has invited Polish leaders to a meeting at their shared border to resolve a blockade by Polish farmers protesting against Ukrainian food imports, Al Jazeera reported. Zelenskyy said on social media that he hoped the proposed border meeting for him, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and a European Union representative could happen before the two-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February. "This is national security," Zelenskyy said. "I am ready to be at the border with our government."

"We have had enough misunderstanding. We should not humiliate each other; we should not humiliate either Ukrainian or Polish farmers. We need unity. We need solutions - between us, Ukraine and Poland, and at the level of the whole of Europe," Zelenskyy said in a statement. However, there has been no immediate reaction from the Polish government, as reported by Al Jazeera. ***—ANI***

Biden announces fresh student loan relief

CALIFORNIA, 22 FEB

President Joe Biden said Wednesday that while a college degree was still a ticket to a better life, that ticket is often too expensive, as he announced he was cancelling federal student loans for nearly 1,53,000 borrowers.

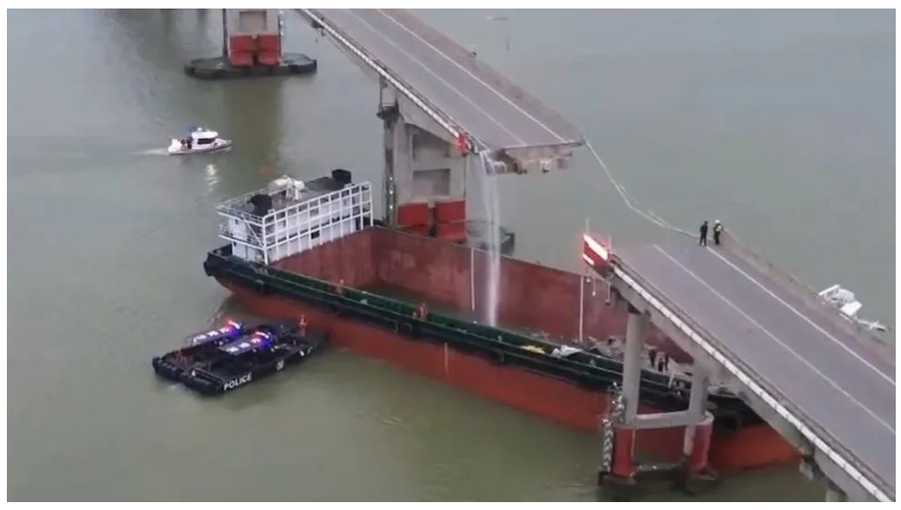
Biden, who is in the midst of a three-day campaign swing through California, made the announcement as part of a new repayment plan that offers a faster path to forgiveness, putting the spotlight on his debt cancellation efforts as he ramps up his reelection campaign.

Too many Americans are still saddled with unsustainable debt in exchange for a college degree, he said from a local library, before he went on to campaign-related events. Loan relief helps the greater economy, he reasoned, because "when people have a student debt relief, they buy homes. They start businesses, they contribute.

The administration began sending email notifications on Wednesday to some of the borrowers who will benefit from what the White House has called the SAVE programme. The cancellations were originally scheduled to start in July, but last month the administration said it would be ready almost six months ahead of schedule, in February.

Starting today, the first round of folks who are enrolled in our SAVE student loan repayment plan who have paid their loans for 10 years and borrowed $12,000 or less will have their debt cancelled, Biden posted on social media Wednesday. That's 1,50,000 Americans and counting. And we're pushing to relieve more." The first round of forgiveness from the SAVE plan will clear $1.2 billion in loans. The borrowers will get emails with a message from Biden notifying them that all or a portion of your federal student loans will be forgiven because you qualify for early loan forgiveness under my Admini stration's SAVE Plan. ***—AP***

SHIP RAMS BRIDGE



At least five people were killed, and five vehicles fell off when a section of a bridge collapsed after it was hit by a container ship in China's Guangzhou on Thursday. The captain of the cargo ship has been arrested. Of the five vehicles, including a bus and a motorbike that fell off the bridge, two plunged into the river and the others fell onto the vessel **PHOTO: CCTV/AP**

Iran set for polls after Mahsa's death

TEHRAN, 22 FEB

Candidates for Iran's parliament began campaigning on Thursday in the country's first election since the bloody crackdown on the 2022 nationwide protests that followed the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody.

State television said 15,200 candidates will compete for a four-year term in the 290-seat chamber that hardliners have controlled for two decades. That is a record number and more than twice the candidates who contested the 2020 election, when voter turnout was just over 42 per cent, the lowest since 1979.

Amini died on 16 September, 2022, after her arrest by Iran's morality police for allegedly violating the country's strict headscarf law that forced women to cover their hair and entire bodies. In the severe crackdown that followed, over 500 people were killed and nearly 20,000 arrested, according to human rights activists in Iran. Any candidate for elections in Iran must be approved by the Council, a 12-member clerical body, half of whom are directly appointed by the supreme leader. ***—AP***

PTI-backed independents join Sunni Ittehad Council

ISLAMABAD, 22 FEB

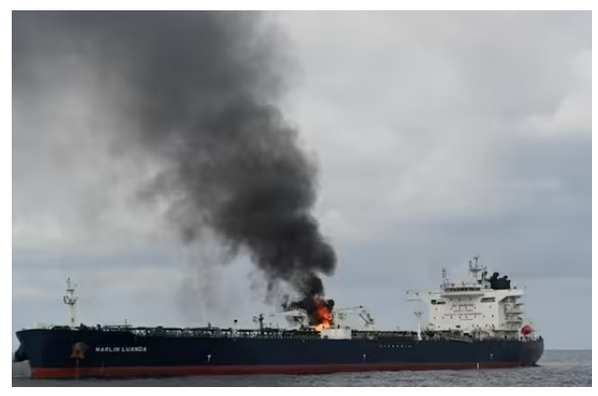
PHOTO: X

Almost all PTI-backed winning independent candidates of national and provincial assemblies submitted affidavits to the Election Commission on Wednesday, officially joining the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC).

As many as 89 MNAs, 85 members of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, 106 members of the Punjab Assembly and nine members of the Sindh Assembly have submitted their affidavits. The submission of affidavits proves the PTI's claim that it had managed to win 93 NA seats, as three party leaders did not submit affidavits, including Omar Ayub Khan, Barrister Gohar Khan and Ali Amin Gandapur, while the notification of one candidate, Dawar Kundi, was yet to be issued by the ECP. Pakistan's caretaker government has constituted a joint investigation team, including from the ISI, following a massive social media campaign against officials and functionaries of the top poll body alleging their involvement in the reported rigging of elections, according to media reports on Thursday. ***—DAWN PTI***

2 MISSILES FIRED

Ship ablaze in Gulf of Aden in Houthi attacks


The attacks come as the rebels escalate their assaults over Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip **PHOTO: X/INDIANNAVY**

DUBAI, 22 FEB

A suspected missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels set a ship ablaze in the Gulf of Aden on Thursday as Israel intercepted what appeared to be another Houthi attack near the port city of Eilat, authorities said.

The attacks come as the rebels escalate their assaults over Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The attack on Thursday in the Gulf of Aden saw two missiles fired, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said. It said the unnamed ship was ablaze, without elaborating. Meanwhile, sirens sounded early on Thursday morning over Eilat, followed by videos posted online of what appeared to be an interception in the sky overhead.

The Israeli military later said the interception was carried out by its Arrow missile defense system.

Israel did not identify what the fire was, nor where it came from. However, the Arrow system intercepts long-range ballistic missiles with a warhead designed to destroy targets while they are in space.

The system "successfully intercepted a launch which was identified in the area of the Red Sea and was en route to Israel," the Israeli military said. "The target did not cross into Israeli territory and did not pose a threat to civilians."

The Houthis did not immediately claim either attack. They typically acknowledge assaults they conduct hours afterward.

Eilat, on the Red Sea, is a key port city of Israel. On 31 October, Houthis first claimed a missile-and-drone barrage targeting the city. The rebels have claimed other attacks targeting Eilat, which have caused no damage in the city.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over Israel's war against Hamas.

They have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for trade among Asia, the Mideast and Europe. Those vessels have included at least one with cargo for Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor.

Despite a month of US-led airstrikes, Houthi rebels remain capable of launching significant attacks. This week, they seriously damaged a ship in a crucial strait and downed an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars. The Houthis insist their attacks will continue until Israel stops its combat operations in the Gaza Strip, which have enraged the wider Arab world and seen the Houthis gain international recognition. ***—AP***

CHINESE RESEARCH VESSEL NEAR MALE

MALE, 22 FEB

On a day when military ships from India and Sri Lanka reached the Maldives coast to participate in a trilateral naval exercise, a Chinese research vessel moored close to the Male port, according to media reports on Thursday. "The Chinese research vessel Xiang Yang Hong 03 was moored close to Male City this morning. Around noon, the ship was shown to be near Thilafushi," news portal Edition.mv reported, quoting the Marine Traffic website that tracks all ocean liners across the globe. On 23 January, the Maldives government permitted the research vessel, equipped to carry research and surveys, to dock at Male port, saying the halt was for replenishment. ***—PTI***

JAAHNAVI KANDULA'S DEATH

US cop who killed Indian student freed by court

WASHINGTON, 22 FEB

The Seattle police officer who struck and killed Indian student Jaahnavi Kandula while responding to an overdose call, will not face any criminal charges due to lack of "sufficient" evidence, authorities said.

On Wednesday, the King County Prosecutor's Office said they will not move forward with criminal charges against Seattle Police Officer Kevin Dave, FOX13 Seattle reported.

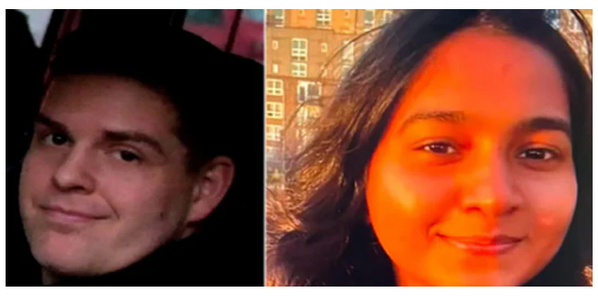
In a statement released Wednesday, the King County Prosecuting Attorney said, "Kandula's death is heartbreaking and impacted communities in King County and across the world."

Kandula, 23, was struck by a police vehicle driven by Officer Dave when she was crossing a street in Seattle on 23 January. He was driving 74 mph (more than 119 kmh) on the way to a report of a drug overdose call. Kandula was thrown 100 feet when she was struck by the speeding police patrol vehicle.

In footage released by the Seattle Police Department, Officer Daniel Auderer laughed about the deadly crash and dismissed any implication Dave might be at fault or that a criminal investigation was necessary.

King County Prosecuting Attorney Leesa Manion said that she believes they lack the evidence to prove a criminal case beyond a reasonable doubt, the report added.

"It is the responsibility of the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office to review all available evidence relating to the case involving Seattle Police Officer Kevin Dave and the January 2023 collision death of Jaahnavi Kandula. After staffing this case with senior deputy prosecuting attorneys and office leadership, I have determined that we lack sufficient evidence under Washington State law to prove a criminal case beyond a reasonable doubt." The statement also said that the prosecutor's office also finds the comments made by Seattle Police Officer Daniel Auderer, recorded on his body-worn video, "appalling and deeply troubling." ***—PTI***


The King County Prosecutor's Office said they will not move forward with criminal charges against Police Officer **PHOTO: X/SALONI**

Rupee rises 13 paise to close at 82.83 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 22 FEB

The rupee appreciated 13 paise to close at 82.83 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, tracking the weakness of the American currency in the overseas market and positive domestic equities. Forex traders said elevated crude oil prices weighed on the local unit and restricted a sharp uptick.At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 82.94 against the greenback. It hit an intraday high of 82.83 during the day. The domestic unit finally settled at 82.83 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 13 paise from its previous close of 82.96. The Indian rupee appreciated on Thursday on weak US dollar and mixed-to-positive domestic markets, said AnujChoudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. However, a surge in crude oil prices capped sharp gains. The US dollar declined on rise in risk appetite in global markets and positive European markets ahead of PMI data from Eurozone and Germany. *—PTI*

Gold slips Rs 50; silver tumbles ₹500

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Gold prices fell Rs 50 to Rs 62,800 per 10g in the national capital on Thursday, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had finished at Rs 62,850 per 10 grams in the previous close.Silver also tumbled Rs 500 to Rs 75,200 per kg , while it had ended at Rs 75,700 per kg in the previous trade. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 62,800 per 10 grams, down by Rs 50 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading flat at USD 2,027 per ounce.*—PTI*

SBI okays Rs 110 cr to AMSL for defence project in Telangana

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Infrastructure solutions provider AMSL on Thursday said SBI has sanctioned a loan of Rs 110 crore for the company's new project in Hyderabad. On Tuesday, Apollo Micro Systems Ltd (AMSL) announced plans to set up a facility in Telangana at Rs 210 crore-investment for manufacturing of defence products. In addition to the loan, the bank has also sanctioned the renewal and enhancement of other credit facilities for a 12-month period up to 8 February, 2025. The cash credit limit has been renewed and enhanced to Rs 57.50 crore from the existing limit of Rs 52.50 crore, while the inland bank guarantee limit has been enhanced to Rs 50 crore from Rs 40 crore.*—PTI*

Bharat Highways InvIT to float ₹2.5Kcr IPO on 28 Feb

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Bharat Highways InvIT, an infrastructure investment trust, on Thursday said it will launch its Rs 2,500 crore Initial Public Offering (IPO) on 28 February. The InvIT's maiden public issue will conclude on 1 March and the price band has been set at Rs 98-100 per unit for the issue, Bharat Highways InvIT said in a statement. Proceeds from the issue will be utilised to provide loans to the Project SPVs (special purpose vehicles) for repayment of their outstanding loans. Bharat Highways InvIT is an infrastructure investment trust established to acquire, manage, and invest in a portfolio of infrastructure assets in India and to carry on the activities of an infrastructure investment trust under Sebi'sInvIT rule.Its initial portfolio consists of seven road assets, all operating on HAM (Hybrid Annuity Model) basis, in Punjab, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh consisting of about 497.292 km of constructed and operational roads.*—PTI*

India will be $10T economy, set for 3rd largest slot: WEF Prez

He describes India as a place with optimism not seen elsewhere

NEW DELHI, 18 FEB

India is on track to become a USD 10 trillion economy in coming years and grab the third-largest slot soon after US and China, World Economic Forum President Borge Brende said.

On Thursday he described the country as a place with optimism not seen elsewhere in a very fragmented and polarised world.

In an exclusive video interview with PTI, Brende also said that the World Economic Forum (WEF) hopes to come back to the country with the WEF India Summit in collaboration with Government of India when the time is ripe.

"The Indian economy is the fastest growing among all large economies of the world. We saw in Davos this year that there was a huge interest in India and I think this will only continue," Brende said.

Geneva-based WEF, which describes itself as an international organisation for public-private cooperation, holds its annual meeting in the Swiss ski resort town Davos every year in January.

World Economic Forum President Borge Brende *PHOTO: PTI*

- India is on track to become a USD 10 trillion economy in coming years and grab the third-largest slot soon after US and China, World Economic Forum President Borge Brende said.

Brende said it is necessary to underline that the economic growth is not so bad, especially in the case of India where "we are seeing 7 per cent economic growth and the world's largest economy, the US, which is also doing very well."

"India has gone through important reforms and it is well placed vis-a-vis the two largest economies, the US and China. Also, India is seeing a good increase in foreign direct investments, a lot of manufacturing activities are now taking place in India which used to happen in other emerging economies," he said.

He also lauded India's digital competitiveness and said digital trade is growing much faster than traditional goods in the world today.

On India's role in handling geopolitical conflicts, Brende said, "We will see a larger and larger Indian footprint on the global diplomatic scene in the years to come."

India's major priority so far has been to secure economic growth, eradicate poverty, and ensure that India is flourishing when it comes to prosperity.

"I think India has also stayed away from any knee-jerk reactions on geopolitical issues. It's not an easy neighbourhood in Asia but India has dealt with situations very well and we do not see any conflicts in this region as we have seen in places like Ukraine and the Middle East," he added.

Brende said India is an important country when it comes to digitalisation with 1.4 billion people with digital IDs, linked bank accounts and effective payment systems.

"At the same time, the advent of new technologies raises concerns. While there are big opportunities presented by generative AI, there are also threats in the form of deepfakes and increased cyber attacks. So, it is very necessary to be vigilant and also have policies for that," he said.

For example, cybercrime last year stole USD 2 trillion from the global economy, he said. *—PTI*

FOR FEMA VIOLATION

The aim is to prevent Raveendran from leaving the country *PHOTO: X*

ED issues look out notice against Byju Raveendran

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Enforcement Directorate has asked the Bureau of Immigration to issue a look out notice against Byju Raveendran, the founder of the in-crisis edtech company Byju's, according to sources.

The aim is to prevent Raveendran from leaving the country.

Reportedly, this development comes ahead of a high-stakes Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) scheduled for this Friday, where it was reported that certain investors were seeking to oust Raveendran from his position.

On Wednesday, the Karnataka High Court had passed an order asking Byju's shareholders not to bring in effect any resolutions during the EGM until the final hearing. The order was on a petition filed by Byjus asking the court to restrain shareholders from holding the EGM.

While the court has not stayed the EGM it has kept any resolutions in abeyance till the final hearing. The court will next hear the matter on 13 March.

Among the issues facing Byju's is the allegation of foreign exchange violations, which has likely prompted the central agency to push for the LOC against Raveendran. Enforcement Directorate had in November 2023 issued show cause notices to Byjus for violations under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) violations amounting to Rs 9362.35 crores.

ED had initiated the investigation on the basis of various complaints regarding the foreign investment received by the company Think and Learn Private Limited and the business conduct of the company.

The company was also stated to have made significant foreign remittances outside India and investments abroad which were allegedly in contravention of provisions of FEMA, 1999 and caused loss of revenue to the Government of India, ED had earlier stated. *—ANI*

Birla group eyes Rs 10,000 cr from paints biz in 3 years

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Aditya Birla group is targeting an initial revenue of Rs 10,000 crore and profitability within three years of full operations of its new venture of decorative paints business, Chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla said on Thursday.

The group on Thursday commenced operations at three plants for its new decorative paints business under Birla Opus.

Birla launched the Birla Opus Paints Business and inaugurating three Birla Opus paints plants at Panipat (Haryana), Ludhiana (Punjab) and Cheyyar (Tamil Nadu).

Grasim Industries, the flagship firm of the group, had last year announced its foray into the decorative paints business committing investments of Rs 10,000 crore with plans to set up six manufacturing plants in India by 2025. In September last year the company had unveiled the brand name of its paints business 'Birla Opus'.

Kumar Mangalam Birla speaks during the launch of the 'Birla Opus' in Panipat *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

The market launch of Birla Opus is scheduled for the fourth quarter of FY24.

This marks the group's entry into the rapidly expanding Rs 80,000 crore Indian decorative paints market.

Birla Opus business is being set up by the group's flagship company Grasim Industries Ltd.

Further, he said Birla Opus, therefore, is poised to transform the paint industry with a 40 per cent addition to current capacity. "No paint company globally has ever launched in one shot -- factories, operations, products, and services, at the scale that we are about to undertake," Birla claimed.

Birla Opus products will be available in Punjab, Haryana, and Tamil Nadu from mid-March 2024 and across all 1 lakh population towns in India by July 2024, he said. The company aims to expeditiously expand its distribution to over 6,000 towns by the fiscal year end. The three other plants in Karnataka, Maharashtra, and West Bengal will become operational later this year. Chamarajanagar (Karnataka), Mahad (Maharashtra) and Kharagpur (West Bengal) units will commence production over the course of FY25. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sensex surges 500 points, Nifty hits all-time high

MUMBAI, 22 FEB

Equity benchmark indices rebounded on Thursday, with Nifty hitting its fresh all-time high and Sensex surging more than 500 points as investors went on a buying spree in IT, automobile and technology stocks.

After starting off on a volatile note, the equity market staged a recovery in the second half of the day, especially after 2.30 pm as the 30-share benchmark Sensex soared 535.15 points or 0.74 per cent to close at 73,158.24 points.

As many as 22 Sensex constituents closed in the positive territory and the index touched an intra-day high of 73,256.39 points.

The broader Nifty climbed 162.40 points or 0.74 per cent to hit its highest ever closing level of 22,217.45 points.

During the intra-day trade, the index touched the peak of 22,252.50 points and 25 Nifty constituents ended the session with gains.

BSE Midcap index gained 0.92 per cent, largecap index climbed 0.81 per cent and smallcap index rose 0.54 per cent.

In the Sensex pack, HCLTech rose the maximum by 3.12 per cent, followed by ITC which gained 2.73 per cent and M&M went up 2.61 per cent. TCS climbed 2.44 per cent.

Tech Mahindra, Wipro, L&T and Maruti were among the other major gainers.

However, stocks of all major banks closed in the red with IndusInd Bank falling1.87 per cent. While HDFC Bank dropped 1.28 per cent, Kotak Mahindra Bank declined 1.11 per cent and SBI slipped 0.73 per cent.

Among other scrips, Hindustan Unilever, Bharti Airtel and Bajaj Finance ended the day in the negative territory. *—PTI*

Taisys operates as a pivotal link between Taiwan and India, capitalising on technological dominance *PHOTO: ANI*

Semiconductor chip market to get $100M from Taiwan

NOIDA, 22 FEB

Taisys, headquartered in Taiwan is strategizing a USD 100 million investment in its Indian Subsidiary to spearhead crucial chip design initiatives aimed at advancing the automotive industry. Taisys India is a leading technology company pioneering connectivity and mobility solutions in India.

As the world's fourth-largest, India's automotive industry is poised to play a crucial role in the nation's GDP. Projected to grow from 7.3 per cent in 2023 to an impressive 10 per cent by 2035, the industry is expected to reach a remarkable USD 600 billion during the same period.

The automotive sector is undergoing a technological transformation across various facets such as product development, sales, servicing, charging infrastructure, financing, and more. This shift is driven by diverse players, including software, IC design, cloud analytics, AI and telecom, contributing to the evolution of electric vehicles (EVs) and internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles.

AbhishekSaxena, the Managing Director of Taisys India, highlights Taisys' commitment to serving over 150 OEMs and ODMs in the Indian automotive sector. Taisys operates as a pivotal link between Taiwan and India, capitalising on Taiwan's technological dominance (accounting for over 60 per cent of global semiconductors) and India's demographic and regulatory strengths. This strategic role positions Taisys at the forefront of the automotive intelligence sector, introducing the innovative 'Design Your Own OneChip™ Concept.' *—ANI*

SpiceJet raises ₹316cr, total funds now ₹1,060cr

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

SpiceJet on Thursday said it has secured an additional Rs 316 crore, taking its total funds raised to Rs 1,060 crore through a preferential share issue.

The fresh capital infusion in the struggling airline comes amid its recent announcement of slashing its workforce by 10-15 per cent.

In January SpiceJet had received Rs 744 crore as the first tranche of funds through the allotment of securities on a preferential basis.

On 12 December, the airline had said it would raise fresh capital of Rs 2,250 crore. *—PTI*

Agriculture credit now ₹20 lakh crore

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Modi government has enhanced the institutional credit into the agriculture sector sharply in the last 10 years, with banks disbursing Rs 20.39 lakh crores during the April-January period of this fiscal as against Rs 7.3 lakh crore in the entire 2013-14, according to a senior official.

In the Budget for 2023-24 fiscal, the government set an agriculture credit target at Rs 20 lakh crore. Banks have already breached the target and the number could cross Rs 22 lakh crore this fiscal.

To ensure the availability of agriculture credit at a reduced interest rate of 7 per cent per annum to the farmers, the Union Agriculture Ministry implements an interest subvention scheme for short-term crop loans up to Rs 3 lakh. The scheme provides interest subvention of 2 per cent per annum to banks on the use of their resources. *—PTI*

SIDBI's outstanding to MFI sector may touch ₹10K cr soon

KOLKATA, 22 FEB

Outstanding of SIDBI to the micro-finance institutions (MFIs) will touch Rs 10,000 crore by the end of the current financial year ending March 2024, an official said on Thursday.In the last financial year, the refinancing development financial institution (DFI) had an outstanding of Rs 5,000 crore to the NBFC-MFI sector, the official said.

Deputy managing director (DMD) of SIDBI Prakash Kumar told PTI on the sidelines of the Eastern India Microfinance Summit here that the the DFI expects this outstanding amount to rise 40 per cent during the next financial year. *—PTI*

Duty free import of yellow peas extended

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

India has extended the timeline for duty-free imports of yellow peas by a month through April, 2024, an official gazette notification said.

In early December, the central government allowed duty-free imports of yellow peas until March 2024. It was part of New Delhi's intervention to cool the prices of the overall pulse basket.

Reportedly, the duty on yellow peas was first implemented in November 2017 at 50 per cent. India largely imports yellow peas from Canada and Russia.

India is a large consumer and grower of pulses and it meets a portion of its consumption needs through imports. India primarily consumes chana, Masur, urad, Kabuli chana, and tur.

As part of centre's intervention, it had in September extended stock limits on tur and urad dal by two months until 31 December, besides revising the stock holding limits for certain stakeholders. *—PTI*

WTO concerned over Chind-led deal proposals

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

The attempt of a group of countries led by China to integrate a proposal on investment facilitation into the World Trade Organisation has systemic concerns for the WTO and it would impact developing nations in pursuing their interest in future, experts say.

They said that the proposal talks about facilitating investments in the WTO member countries, but there is mixed evidence that such agreements help attract investors. The concerns of the experts on the issue assumes significance as a China-led group of 130 countries are pushing to get an approval on their Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) proposal in the WTO's 13th ministerial conference (MC) this month.

The four-day meeting of trade ministers of 164-member global trade rule making body WTO begins on 26 February at Abu Dhabi, UAE. MC is the highest decision making body of the WTO.

The experts also said that this is a proposal of a group of countries, which is called a plurilateral agreement or joint statement initiative, which is not accepted by a number of nations including India and South Africa.

India has stated that this agenda falls outside the mandate of the global trade body. The group wants to bring the proposal through annexure-4 of the WTO under which the proposal would be binding on only the signatory members and not on those who are opposed to it. India should oppose in that case also as it will gradually normalise plurilateral pacts and that will "really erode the influence of developing countries to advance their interest in the future", Abhijit Das, an expert said. *—PTI*

AMID RECESSION

Japan market sees record high after 1989

TOKYO, 22 FEB

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 index surged Thursday past the record it set in 1989 before its financial bubble burst, ushering in an era of faltering growth.

The index closed Thursday at 39,098.68, up 2.2 per cent. It had been hovering for weeks near 34-year highs. Its previous record was 38,915.87, set on December 29, 1989.

That was more than a generation ago at the height of Japan's post-war boom.

After the peak, as banks wrote off some 100 trillion Yen in bad debts, shares meandered well below the record for many years — dipping below 8,200 in 2011 after the triple disasters of a massive earthquake and tsunamis and meltdowns at the Fukushima Dai-Ichi nuclear power plant in northeastern Japan.

But the market has logged sharp gains in recent months, helped by strong interest from foreign investors who account for the majority of trading volume on the Tokyo exchange.

Unlike in the United States, where shares have been topping records on hopes the Federal Reserve will begin cutting high interest rates once it decides inflation is truly under control, in Japan the benchmark rate has remained at minus 0.1 per cent for over a decade.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 index surged on Thursday *PHOTO: X*

News that the economy slipped into recession in late 2023 has raised hopes that the Bank of Japan will stick to the easy money policies it has been using to try to spur inflation and push growth higher.

Plenty of the money the central bank has pumped into the economy has found its way into the stock market. And many global investors have been shifting their portfolios away from China as its economy slows and tensions flare between Washington and Beijing. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

It's a typical Indian wicket with cracks: Rathour

RANCHI, 22 FEB

India batting coach Vikram Rathour on Thursday said the Ranchi wicket hosting the fourth Test against England has "enough cracks" and would favor the spinners but insisted they have enough firepower to cope with any condition.India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah has been the top-wicket-taker of the series but he will be missing the fourth Test after being given a break to manage his workload.The move has led many to believe that India will go for a rank-turner for the fourth Test beginning on Friday. "Every time we play in India, there's a question mark on the pitch ... It's a typical Indian wicket, there are cracks, this wicket always had cracks," Rathour told reporters on the eve of the match.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Pacer Akash could get a Test cap in Bumrah's absence

RANCHI, 22 FEB

Uncapped pace bowler Akash Deep has emerged as the frontrunner to partner Siraj in the fourth Test against England after he was seen sweating it out during optional training here on Thursday.India has been forced to hand debut caps to Rajat Patidar, Dhruv and Sarfaraz so far because of the absence of Virat, Rahul, and Iyer, and with pace spearhead Bumrah being rested for the Ranchi Test, Akash Deep could also be in line for the coveted Test spot.—*PTI*

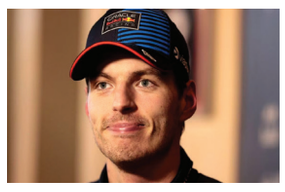


PHOTO: IANS

Toto Wolff breaks silence on Christian Horner

PARIS, 22 FEB

Max Verstappen Dominates Testing as Toto Wolff Says Christian Horner Probe 'Issue For All F1'Max Verstappen's performance was a boost for a Red Bull team reeling from an investigation into team chief Christian Horner who has been accused of "inappropriate behaviour" by a female member of staff. Verstappen's performance was a boost for a Red Bull team reeling from an investigation into team chief Christian Horner who has been accused of "inappropriate behaviour" by a female member of staff."It feels good to be back in an F1 car again and I had fun out on track today. We covered a lot of laps and tried quite a few things with the car, which was important, so happy overall with how it went," said Verstappen.
—*AP*

Thakur clinches giant slalom gold in KIWG

GULMARG, 22 FEB

India's leading alpine skier Aanchal Thakur clinched the giant slalom gold on day two of the Khelo India Winter Games as Himachal Pradesh women made a clean sweep of the medals in the event here on Thursday.Aanchal, the 27-year-old from Himachal Pradesh, won with a time of 00:56.339 seconds, followed by state-mates Tunaja Thakur and Promila Thakur who won silver and bronze, respectively. Karnataka continued to lead the medals tally at the Koongdoori course with eight gold medals.
—*PTI*

Confident India faces selection dilemma

I've never seen something like Ranchi pitch: Ben Stokes

RANCHI, 22 FEB

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah's absence is a concern but an assertive and adaptive India will have the edge against England's seemingly depth-less 'Bazball' approach when the two sides clash in the potentially series-deciding fourth Test beginning here on Friday.

From the dry heat of Rajkot to the much cooler confines of Ranchi, the temperature shift would be the only soothing factor for the Englishmen who have let it slip against the resilient hosts and are trailing 1-2.

Eyeing a 17th series win on the trot at home, India has been near-invincible since the shock defeat to Alastair Cook's England in 2012.

After that, India has won a staggering 38 out of 47 Tests and has lost just thrice (two each versus Australia and England) when challenged on home turf.

Captaining a depleted batting line-up in the absence of Virat Kohli, KL Rahul, and an out-of-form Shreyas Iyer, Rohit Sharma has found answers from the young guns, whose performance has been the biggest takeaway from the series so far.

Whether it is Yashasvi Jaiswal, who has maintained an impressive average of 109 with a total of 545 runs, or Sarfaraz Khan, who ended his prolonged wait for a Test debut with a blazing 66-ball 62 in Rajkot, or Shubman Gill, gradually settling in at No.3, India's next generation of batters are showcasing how a seamless transition happens.

India's Ashwin, batting coach Rathour, and others inspect the pitch during a practice session ahead of the fourth Test cricket match between India and England *PHOTO: PTI*

England captain **Ben Stokes** added spice to the talks on Ranchi's pitch for the fourth Test against India, saying he has not seen anything remotely like the 22-yard strip here in the past.

India is leading the five-match series 2-1 and the penultimate Test will start here on Friday.

However, discussion about the "platey cracks" on the pitch as described by England batter Ollie Pope has dominated the build-up to this Test.

Stokes added a touch of intrigue as well.

"It looked interesting, didn't it? I don't know. I can't say much. I don't know, I've never seen something like that before so I have no idea. I don't know what could happen," Stokes was quoted as saying by ESPNCricinfo.

It indeed was an ominous reading of the playing surface, if you are from the England camp.

England captain Ben Stokes *PHOTO:PTI*

But then Stokes had a reason for it as well. "If you looked down one side of opposite ends it just looked different to what I am used to seeing, especially out in India.

It looked green and grassy up in the changing rooms, but then you go out there, it looked different. Very dark and crumbly and quite a few cracks in it," Stokes offered.

Match starts at **9.30** am (IST)

—*PTI*

Messi and Inter Miami beat Real Salt Lake 2-0 in MLS season opener *PHOTO: AFP*

Messi and Inter Miami beat Real Salt Lake 2-0

DUBAI, 23 FEB

Lionel Messi assisted a first-half goal by Robert Taylor and Inter Miami weathered a second-half storm from Real Salt Lake to emerge with a 2-0 victory in the first match of the 2024 Major League Soccer season.

Inter Miami dominated the first half in Fort Lauderdale and finally broke through in the 39th minute when the defense collapsed around the Argentinean great just outside of the box.

Messi split the defenders and found a sprinting Taylor, whose low shot initially looked like it had been saved by Zac MacMath before it spun out of his arms and into the net.

After the break, Salt Lake, which had looked tentative in the first half, came out energized against the older Miami side, which spent its busy MLS off-season playing matches in Asia and the Middle East.

Inter Miami survived the second-half onslaught with help from some clutch saves by Drake Steven Callender and sealed the win when Messi set up a sequence that saw former Barcelona teammate Luis Suarez assist youngster Diego Gomez in the 83rd minute.

—*AP*

Rune with former coach Patrick *PHOTO: AFP*

Rune reunites with coach Mouratoglou

TOKYO, 1 FEB

Holger Rune has reunited with former coach Patrick Mouratoglou after the world number seven's partnership with Boris Becker and Severin Luthi ended following a disappointing Australian Open campaign last month.

Rune hired German great Becker in October before adding Roger Federer's former mentor Luthi to his team ahead of the 2024 season but both left after the Dane fell to French wild card Arthur Cazaux in the second round at Melbourne Park.

The 20-year-old has previously worked with Frenchman Mourato glou and won the 2022 Paris Masters title, beating world number one Novak Djokovic in the final under his guidance.

"Sometimes you must try a variety of things to find out what works for you and what does not," Rune said on social media site X, formerly Twitter, confirming Mouratoglou's return.

"In the recent months, I have learned a lot about what's important for me. With Patrick, I did some of my greatest triumphs and I believe he can help me achieve my goals."

Mouratoglou said he was excited to return to Rune's team. —*AP*

Indian archers storm into six team finals in Asia Cup

BAGHDAD, 22 FEB

Indian archers, including former world number one Deepika Kumari who is making a comeback after 20 months, stormed into the final of six team events to assure themselves of as many medals in the Asia Cup Leg 1 here on Thursday.

The three-time Olympian, whose form had slipped after becoming mother, came second behind Simranjeet Kaur in the qualification in the women's recurve team event.

In the elimination round, the Indian women's recurve team which also had Bhajan Kaur blanked hosts Iraq to set up a gold medal clash against Uzbekistan.

The men's recurve team of Dhiraj Bommadevara, Pravin Jadhav, and Tarundeep Rai also ousted the hosts, winning in straight sets. They will face Bangladesh in the final.

In a recurve mixed team event, India eliminated Syria and Qatar in straight sets to make the final where the duo of Dhiraj and Simranjeet will take on Bangladesh. India's Jawkar, Priyansh, and Kushal Dalal defeated hosts Iraq in the semifinal 233-223 to make the men's compound team final where they will face Iran.The team of Aditi Swami, Priya Gurjar, and Parneet Kaur defeated Afghanistan 234-210 to set up a summit clash against Iran in the compound women's team event. —*AP*

Indian archers Simranjeet Kaur, Deepika Kumari, and Bhajan Kaur have entered the finals of the six events to ensure a medal each in the Asia Cup Leg 1 *PHOTO: AFP*

Holders CSK to play RCB in IPL opener in Chennai on 22 March

CSK vs RCB encounters in the IPL are the most sought-after matches as fans get to witness the MS Dhoni vs Virat Kohli rivalry. *PHOTO: AFP*

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Defending champions Chennai Super Kings will take on Royal Challengers Bangalore in the 2024 IPL season-opener in Chennai on 22 March, the BCCI announced Thursday while unveiling the schedule for the first 17 days of the popular T20 league.

The roster for the remaining matches will be announced once the dates for the upcoming general elections are announced early next month.

During the period from 22 March to 7 April, a total of 21 matches will be played across 10 cities, with each team playing a minimum of three matches and a maximum of five.

As in the past, the BCCI will work closely with government and security agencies, following all necessary protocols and advisories related to the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections in India, the apex cricket body said in a statement.

"Once the dates for the 18th Lok Sabha elections are announced, the Board will review and address any issues about the schedule of the first two weeks.

—*PTI*

TATA IPL | STAR SPORTS — OFFICIAL BROADCASTER

TATA IPL 2024 SCHEDULE

MATCH	DATE	DAY	TIME (PM)	VENUE
CSK v RCB	22 MAR	FRI	6:30	CHENNAI
PBKS v DC	23 MAR	SAT	2:30	MOHALI
KKR v SRH	23 MAR	SAT	6:30	KOLKATA
RR v LSG	24 MAR	SUN	2:30	JAIPUR
GT v MI	24 MAR	SUN	6:30	AHMEDABAD
RCB v PBKS	25 MAR	MON	6:30	BENGALURU
CSK v GT	26 MAR	TUE	6:30	CHENNAI
SRH v MI	27 MAR	WED	6:30	HYDERABAD
RR v DC	28 MAR	THU	6:30	JAIPUR
RCB v KKR	29 MAR	FRI	6:30	BENGALURU
LSG v PBKS	30 MAR	SAT	6:30	LUCKNOW
GT v SRH	31 MAR	SUN	2:30	AHMEDABAD
DC v CSK	31 MAR	SUN	6:30	VIZAG
MI v RR	1 APR	MON	6:30	MUMBAI
RCB v LSG	2 APR	TUE	6:30	BENGALURU
DC v KKR	3 APR	WED	6:30	VIZAG
GT v PBKS	4 APR	THU	6:30	AHMEDABAD
SRH v CSK	5 APR	FRI	6:30	HYDERABAD
RR v RCB	6 APR	SAT	6:30	JAIPUR
MI v DC	7 APR	SUN	2:30	MUMBAI
LSG v GT	7 APR	SUN	6:30	LUCKNOW

Real Madrid midfielder Kroos agrees to play for Germany

MADRID, 22 FEB

Real Madrid midfielder Toni Kroos said he has agreed to play for Germany again after a request from coach Julian Nagelsmann ahead of the home European Championship.

The 34-year-old Kroos has not played for Germany in three years since the team's exit in the round of 16 at the last European Championship.

"I will play for Germany again in March. Why? Because I was asked by the national team coach, I'm keen to do it and I am sure that much more is possible with the team at the Euros than most people believe!" Kroos wrote on Thursday on Instagram.

Toni Kroos *PHOTO: AFP*

Germany has friendlies against France on March 23 and the Netherlands three days later. The host nation has been drawn against Scotland, Hungary, and Switzerland in the group stage at the European Championship, which starts on 14 June.

—*AP*

Footballer Dani sentenced to 4.5 years in jail for rape

PARIS, 22 FEB

A Spanish court on Thursday sentenced former Brazil international Dani Alves to four and a half years in prison after finding him guilty of raping a young woman at a Barcelona nightclub in December 2022.

It also ordered the three-time Champions League winner to five years probation after he served his jail term, and demanded he pay 150,000 euros ($162,000) in compensation to the victim. "The victim did not consent and there is evidence that, beyond the complainant's testimony, permits the rape to be considered proven," the Barcelona court wrote in a statement.

Dani Alves *PHOTO: AFP*

—*AP*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Liverpool survives Anfield anxiety attack

LONDON, 22 FEB

Klopp had demanded a 'European night' to ensure Liverpool cast aside their injury problems and keep Manchester City and Arsenal at bay.

Eventually, he got it, but not without a temporary diversion to some darker, defeatist areas of the Anfield psyche.

Do not be fooled by the emphatic 4-1 final score. This was one of the strangest and most manic high-scoring wins Klopp's reign has witnessed.

Jurgen Klopp can reel off the names of his greatest Anfield nights; Barcelona, Roma, Borussia Dortmund.

Jurgen Klopp *PHOTO: AFP*

Who predicted he would be adding Luton Town?

Neutrals will mock, of course. How could what looks like a routine home victory over a side in the bottom three be ranked alongside some of the most iconic in the club's history?

For sheer persistence, overcoming adversity, and transforming the mood of a stadium from one of communal hysteria to euphoria, this Liverpool win will be considered among Klopp's most satisfying.

Liverpool extended the gap to second-placed Man City to four points. *PHOTO: TWITTER*

- Klopp had demanded a 'European night' to ensure Liverpool cast aside their injury problems and keep Manchester City and Arsenal at bay. Eventually, he got it, but not without a temporary diversion to some darker, defeatist areas of the Anfield psyche.

Being bereft of eleven first-team players does not quite equate to being 3-0 down in the Champions League semi-final, but as Liverpool scored three in 15 minutes, Klopp felt his players were infused with the spirit of Divock Origi.

"I will mention this game quite a few times," said Klopp.

"I promised my team I would never mention the Barcelona game as an example and I used it today so I broke my promise - many players missing and quite similar. This is now there.

Barcelona, now Luton. Plenty of reasons to give up and I saw only a super group fighting."

For 45 minutes, Liverpool was in the grip of a sustained anxiety attack, a goal down, running around like out-of-control Duracell bunnies, and provoking screams of despair as Luton again demonstrated why they are no relegation fodder.

Klopp's half-time message had a desired and spectacular impact as Liverpool re-emerged feistier and with a clearer sense of direction, skipper Virgil Van Dijk leading the charge before Cody Gakpo, Luis Diaz and Harvey Elliott gave the false impression of a routine victory.

"We made them angry didn't we?" chuckled Luton coach Rob Edwards.

"After a really good first half. In the second half, we saw Anfield.

—*AP*